OVERLORD 〔6〕 The men in the Kingdom *Kugane Maruyama*

オーバーロード 6

王国の漢たち｜下

丸山くがね 著

illustration by so-bin

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超強い。
吸血鬼娘。
超肉食。
擬態系蜘蛛娘。

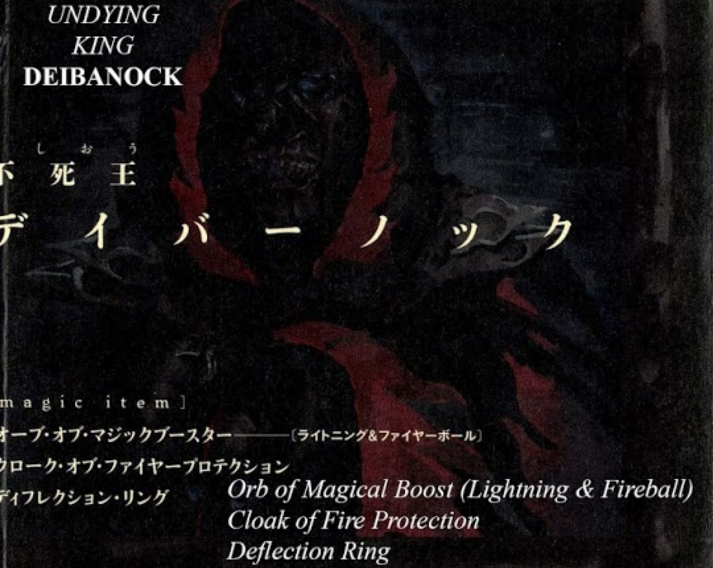
OVERLORD The dark hero's story

オーバーロード
6
王国の漢たち｜下

特装版
Special Edition

オーバーロード

漆黒の英雄譚————ドラマCD第2巻

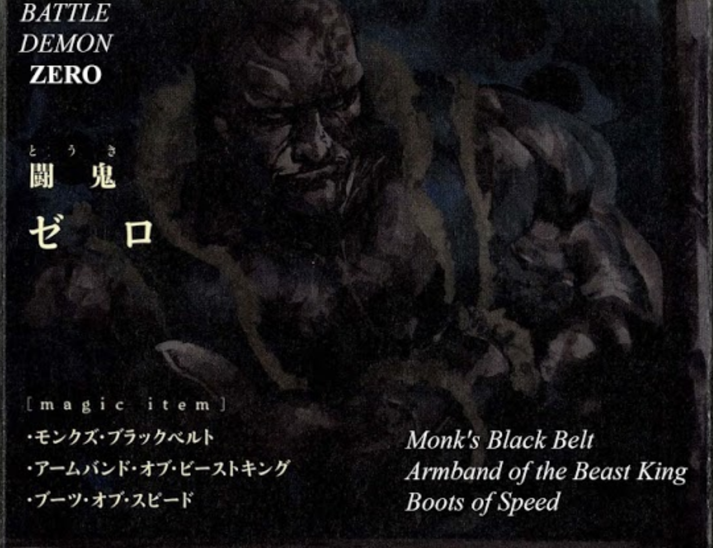


UNDYING KING
DEIBANOCK

しおう
不死王
デイバーノック

magic item]
・オーブ・オブ・マジックブースター——〔ライトニング&ファイヤーボール〕
・クローク・オブ・ファイヤープロテクション
・ディフレクション・リング

Orb of Magical Boost (Lightning & Fireball)
Cloak of Fire Protection
Deflection Ring

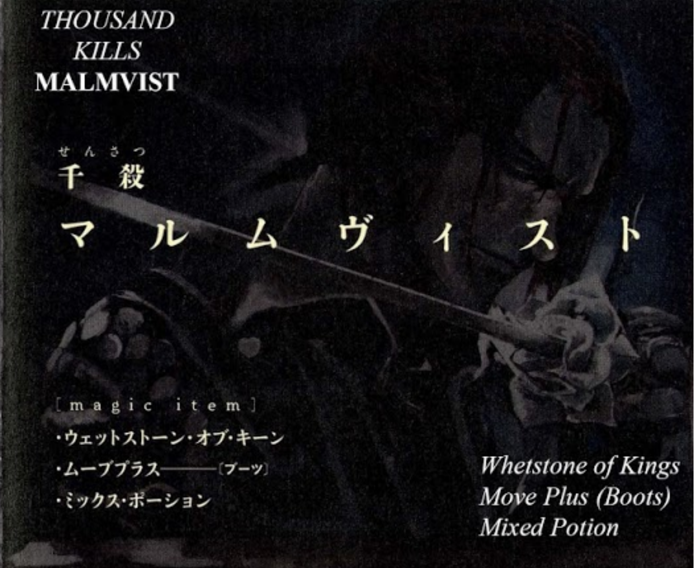


BATTLE DEMON
ZERO

とうき
闘鬼
ゼロ

[magic item]
・モンクズ・ブラックベルト
・アームバンド・オブ・ビーストキング
・ブーツ・オブ・スピード

Monk's Black Belt
Armband of the Beast King
Boots of Speed

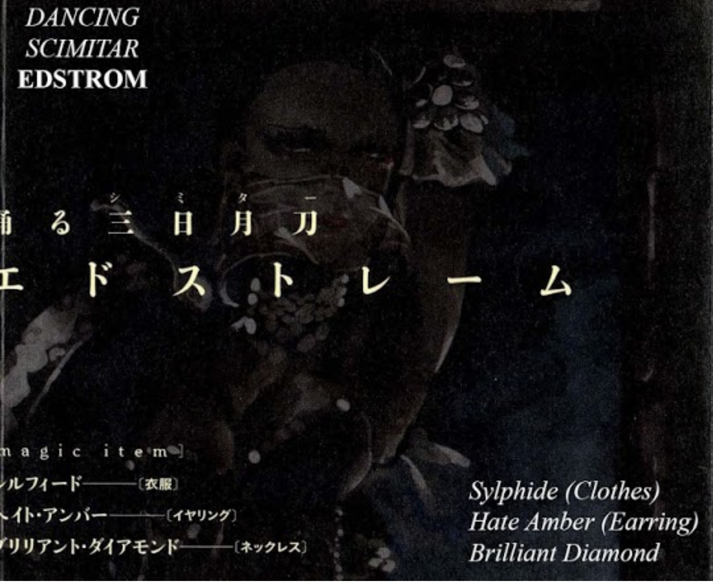


THOUSAND KILLS
MALMVIST

せんさつ
千殺
マルムヴィスト

[magic item]
・ウェットストーン・オブ・キーン
・ムーブプラス——〔ブーツ〕
・ミックス・ポーション

Whetstone of Kings
Move Plus (Boots)
Mixed Potion

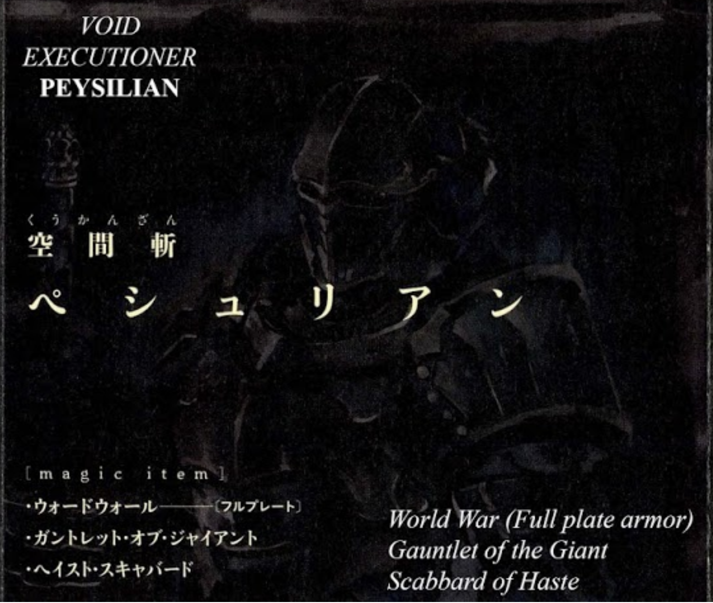


DANCING SCIMITAR
EDSTROM

シミター
踊る三日月刀
エドストレーム

magic item]
・ルフィード——〔衣服〕
・ヘイト・アンバー——〔イヤリング〕
・ブリリアント・ダイアモンド——〔ネックレス〕

Sylphide (Clothes)
Hate Amber (Earring)
Brilliant Diamond

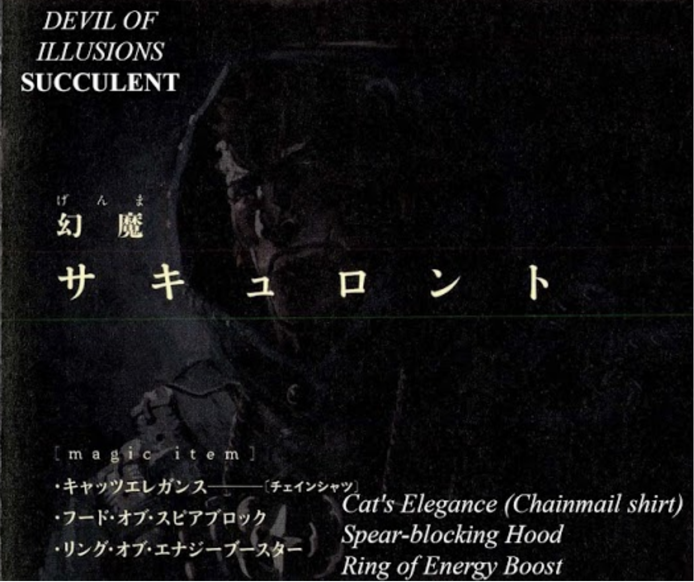


VOID EXECUTIONER
PEYSILIAN

くうかんざん
空間斬
ペシュリアン

[magic item]
・ウォードウォール——〔フルプレート〕
・ガントレット・オブ・ジャイアント
・ヘイスト・スキャバード

World War (Full plate armor)
Gauntlet of the Giant
Scabbard of Haste



DEVIL OF ILLUSIONS
SUCCULENT

げんま
幻魔
サキュロント

[magic item]
・キャッツエレガンス——〔チェインシャツ〕
・フード・オブ・スピアブロック
・リング・オブ・エナジーブースター

Cat's Elegance (Chainmail shirt)
Spear-blocking Hood
Ring of Energy Boost

Chapter 6 - Introduction to the Royal Capital's Disturbance

OVERLORD 「6」 The men in the Kingdom

6章　王都動乱序章

Part 1

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 3rd, 17:44

The reception room door opened slowly. Even though the hinges had been freshly greased and should open smoothly, the door opened slowly as if there was a huge pressure difference between the inside and the outside. It was just like Sebas' heart. If the door knew how he felt, it wouldn't have opened, but it still swung open and he could see all who waited for him inside. Waiting inside the normally empty room were four heteromorphic figures. One was a cyan coloured warrior. He had cancelled his cold aura and stood rigidly with a halberd in hand. One was a devil. What kind of emotion would he be hiding behind his mocking face? In the devil's arms was a fetus looking angel with wings that looked like tree branches.

And the last—

"I have no excuse for being late."

Using all his willpower to suppress the shaking in his voice, Sebas offered a deep bow to the Supreme Being who was the only one sitting down. For Sebas, who held the position of house steward and butler, there was only one being whom he bowed to in fear and respect. One of the 41 Supreme Beings.

—Ainz Ooal Gown.

The ruler of Nazarick who held overwhelming power. In his hand was the 'Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown' which was emitting a dark aura. In his empty eye sockets, faint red flames flickered about. Sebas could feel those eyes slowly scanning his bowing figure.

“...Don’t worry about that, Sebas. It is my fault for arriving without any prior notice. Enter, we can’t have a conversation if you are just bowing down by the door.”

“Yes.”

Sebas reacted to the heavy voice and got up with his head still bowing. When he took a single step forward, he felt a chill going down his back. He could sense hidden hostility and killing intent. His gaze slowly shifted to the two Guardians. They did not appear as if they were paying attention to him, but only a normal person would think that. Sebas could already tell. In that tense atmosphere, there was no friendly aura. It was the exact opposite, he was being treated like an enemy. Sebas could guess why they might hold such hostility at him and wondered if anybody else could hear his pounding heart.

“It would be best for you to stop there.”

Demiurge’s cold voice stopped Sebas in his tracks. It was somewhat far from the master. It wasn’t too far to hold a conversation and it was a respectful distance considering how big the room was.

However, if it was Ainz, he would have told Sebas to come closer. The lack of such words gave Sebas an even stronger sense of isolation.

Not only that, but the distance was within the ideal range of Cocytus’ attack.

Solution who came in with Sebas also stood by the door.

“Now then…”

Sebas could not figure out how, but Ainz made a hollow sound with his skeleton fingers.

“I shall ask you first, Sebas. Do I need to explain why I am here?”

There was only one reason. The situation alone was telling enough.

“...No, I understand.”

“Then I want to hear it from your own mouth, Sebas. I heard the report, it seems you picked up a cute pet?”

—As expected.

Sebas felt a chill down his spine. Then he remember that he had yet to answer his master and quickly raised his voice.

“—Yes!”

“...You’re late in your answer. I will ask again, Sebas. You are raising a cute pet?”
“Yes, I am raising her.”

“Then I shall hear you out first. Why did you not report it to me?”

Sebas looked towards the floor with shaking shoulders, fearing that the situation would become worse if he were to say something. Seeing how Sebas had yet to answer, Ainz leaned to a side in the chair. Creaking noise echoed loudly through the room.

“What is it, Sebas? You seem to be sweating. Shall I lend you a handkerchief?”

Ainz took out a white handkerchief with an exaggerated motion and nonchalantly threw it in Sebas’ direction. The handkerchief flew past the desk and opened up before falling to the floor.

“I permit you to use it.”

“Yes! Thank you.”
Sebas took a step to pick up the handkerchief, but hesitated to use it.

“...There is nothing like your pet’s blood on it. I just didn’t want to see you sweating so profusely.”

“I apologize for showing you my unbecoming side.”

Sebas opened up the handkerchief and wiped his sweat away. The handkerchief changed colour from absorbing an unexpectedly large amount of moisture.

“Now, Sebas. When I sent you to the capital, I told you to record everything and send back reports. This was because it’s difficult for you to determine which information is useful or not. As a matter of fact, there are a lot of rumours that were written on the report as well, correct?”

“Yes, that is so.”

“Then Demiurge, I’ll ask you for confirmation, since you have seen all the reports Sebas sent as well. Was there any mention of the pet in the report?”

“No, Ainz-sama. I checked again multiple times, but there was not a single mention.”

“Then, Sebas, tell me why you have done so. Why did you not report it? …I want to know why you have ignored my order. Is the word of Ainz Ooal Gown not enough to compel you?”

That sentence shook the atmosphere. Sebas hurriedly replied.

“Of course not. It was my foolishness to think that it wasn’t important enough to report to you, Ainz-sama.”

Silence descended.

Four killing intents pierced his body: Cocytus, Demiurge, the angel Demiurge was holding in his arms and Solution. With a single command, they would not hesitate to attack him.

There was no fear of death. To die for Nazarick was a great honour, but the notion of dying as a traitor made Sebas’ body shake. For a creation of the 41 Supreme Beings, dying as a traitor was the greatest shame there could be. By the time Sebas’ forehead was full of sweat once more, Ainz spoke.

“...So what you are saying is, it was your own foolish decision? Is that what you mean?”

“Yes, Ainz-sama. Please forgive my indiscretion.”

“...Hmm, is that so… I understand.”

After hearing Sebas’ heartfelt apology, Ainz’s neutral voice returned once again. As there were no orders to eliminate Sebas, the atmosphere returned to normal once again. However, Sebas could not rest easy as Ainz's next command made Sebas' heart sink.

"Solution. Bring Sebas' pet over here."

"Understood."

After Solution left, door closed quietly. Sebas' sharp senses tracked Solution's footsteps beyond the door, walking farther and farther away. In this place, there were four heteromorphic beings: Ainz, Demiurge, Cocytus and the strangely shaped angel. Was the reason they didn't bother to hide their appearance because there wouldn't be a need to? If someone from Nazarick wished to silence someone, killing was the best method. He should have released her sooner. Sebas shook his head on the inside , but it was already too late for such thoughts. He could feel two people approaching the door.

—*What should I do?*

Sebas' looked up at the empty ceiling. If she's coming here, then he needed to decide. There was only one choice. He looked at Demiurge and Ainz who were still watching him, and his gaze fell down to the floor once again. A knock sounded at the door and opened. There were two women standing there, as expected.

"I have brought her."

Even though Sebas has his back turned to her, he could hear Tsuare gasp at the door. Maybe she was panicking after seeing a devil, Demiurge. Maybe she was scared after seeing a giant insect, Cocytus. Maybe she was terrified after seeing an angel that looked like a fetus. Maybe she was petrified after seeing death incarnate, Ainz. Or maybe it was all of it.

The Guardians’ displeasure only intensified with Tsuare in front of them. In some way, she was the embodiment of Sebas’ mistakes and failures. Tsuare could not stop shaking at all the hostility directed at her. In this world, Guardians were the ultimate beings, and all weaklings would tremble in fear at the mere sight of them. The fact that Tsuare wasn’t crying was already an amazing feat. Sebas did not look back, but he could feel Tsuare’s gaze fixed on him. Her courage came from the fact Sebas was in the same room.

“Cocytus, Demiurge, stop. Learn from Victim’s example.”

With Ainz’s soft voice, the atmosphere changed. No, it should be said that all hostility towards Tsuare vanished. Ainz extended his left hand towards Tsuare and motioned for her to enter.

“Enter, Sebas’ new human pet, Tsuare.”

As if she was under a spell, she entered the room with shaky steps.

“You didn’t try to escape, very courageous of you. Or did you hear something from Solution? That depending on how you act, Sebas’ fate will be decided?”

Tsuare, who was shaking non-stop, could not reply. Sebas felt her gaze towards his back intensify. It alone let him know how she truly felt. Without hesitation, Tsuare stood behind Sebas as she entered the room. Cocytus slowly moved and stood behind Tsuare as if he was waiting for something. Tsuare grabbed the corner of Sebas’ sleeves. Sebas could remember when she first had grabbed onto him in the alleyway. Perhaps if he had acted more prudently back then, this would not have happened.

Demiurge looked at Tsuare in a cold manner and then suddenly—

“Kneel immed—”

— The sound of a finger snap rung out.

Demiurge, who was about to speak understood what his master wanted, and swallowed the words he wanted to say.

“—It is fine, Demiurge. For having the courage to not run away, I, the ruler of Nazarick shall forgive her for the lack of manners.”

“My deepest apologies.”

Ainz nodded slowly at Demiurge’s apology.

“Then…”

The chair squeaked as weight shifted.

“First would be the introduction. I am Ainz Ooal Gown, Sebas’ master.”

It was so. The 41 Supreme Beings, they controlled everything; even Sebas’ life and death. His master’s declaration that he was a servant brought him the greatest joy. Unfortunately, the happiness was only strong enough to make his back shake a little. It wasn’t because Tsuare was there, because for a moment he even forgot that she was there. No, it was something else. Even while Sebas thought about it, the conversation continued.

“Ah… …I’m…”

“It’s alright, Tsuare. I just need to know that you exist. I have no interest in you besides that. You simply need to stand there. You will find out why I called you over soon.”

“Then…”

The red light in Ainz’ empty eye sockets moved.

“...Sebas, I want to hear it from you. I ordered you to act as discreetly as possible.”

“Yes.”

“Because of this worthless woman, you allowed an annoying matter to develop, am I correct?”

“You are right.”

Tsuare squirmed a little at the mention of ‘worthless’, but Sebas remained still.

“...Do you not think it was an act of willfully disobeying my order?”

“I deeply apologize that my shallow thoughts have displeased you. I shall take caution so something like this never happens again—”

“—It’s fine.”

“My lord?”

“I said it’s fine.”

Ainz fixed his posture once again and the chair squeaked.

“Everyone makes mistakes. Sebas, I forgive your transgression.”

“—I thank Ainz-sama for his generosity.”

“But every mistake has a price... Kill it.”

The room’s atmosphere tensed up again and it felt as if the temperature had dropped a couple degrees. No, it wasn’t truly so. The only one who felt it was Sebas. Everybody else from Nazarick were unmoved.

Sebas gulped.

What did he order to be killed? No, there was no need to ask. The fact things had to turn out this way made Sebas’ heart and mouth equally heavy.

“...I beg your… pardon…”

“Hmm… I mean for you to eliminate the root of your mistake, thus redeeming yourself. If any trace of your mistake remains, it would set a bad example for the others. You are the butler of Nazarick. One who stands above many. If someone of such an important position does nothing to rectify his mistakes…”

Sebas let out a deep breath and breathed in again. He who did not shirk before even the strongest of opponents felt like a small prey cornered by a predator.

“Sebas, are you someone who follows the decisions of the 41 Supreme Beings, or are you someone who follows his own decisions?”

“That is—”

“There is no need for words. Show me through your action.”

Ainz closed his eyes and opened them again.

Hesitating just for a second, no, even a second was a long time to hesitate. It was enough time for loyal servants like Cocytus, Demiurge and Solution to show hostility once more. In that amount of time, Sebas came to a conclusion.

Sebas was Nazarick’s butler. He was nothing more than that. His foolish hesitation caused this situation. If he had asked for a permission earlier, this would not have happened. It was all his fault.

Sebas’ eyes emitted a steely look. He turned around to Tsuare and her hands released their grip. They floated in the air hesitantly for a moment before slumping. Tsuare could understand which conclusions Sebas came to after looking at his face.

She smiled and closed her eyes. There was no signs of fear or desperation on her. She had the face of a martyr who was ready to accept her fate. Sebas’ movements had no hesitation in it either. Sebas was calm. His action was how a loyal servant of Nazarick should act. There was no reason to disobey the master’s orders.

There would be no regret. There could only be loyalty.

Sebas gripped his fist tightly to grant her the only mercy he could afford to give, a quick death. His fist flew towards Tsuare’s head.

Then—

—Something hard intercepted his first.

“—Why are you interfering?”

Sebas’ fist, which was supposed to blow away Tsuare’s head had been blocked. One of Cocytus’ arms had caught his fist. Preventing him from carrying out his order, wasn’t Cocytus disobeying the Master? But Sebas’ astonishment was cleared up immediately.

“Stand down, Sebas.”

As he was about to strike for the second time, Sebas obeyed Ainz’s words. There was no reprimand for Cocytus, but only an order for Sebas to stand down. In another word, the reason Cocytus stopped Sebas was because it had been planned so.

Everything had been an act, designed to test Sebas’ loyalty and will. Tsuare opened her eyes slightly and confirmed that death was not going to happen immediately. As the threat of death went away, so did all her tension and Tsuare sniffled as her body started shaking. Her legs looked as if they would give in at any moment, but Sebas did not hold her. No, he couldn’t hold her. What could he possibly do? He was a man who had abandoned her. Ignoring Tsuare, who was gripped in fear, Cocytus and Ainz started talking to each other.

“It was. Indeed. A killing. Blow.”

“Then I will declare that Sebas’ loyalty is no longer questioned. You did well, Sebas.”

“Yes!”

Sebas bowed deeply with a rigid expression.

“—Demiurge. Any objection from you?”

“None.”

“Cocytus.”

“Nothing.”

“...Victim?”

“!rewop eht evah I ......lluksyarG fo rewop eht yB (There is none.)”

“Then we shall move on to the next matter.”

Ainz stood up with a fingersnap and let his robes flutter with a wave of his arm.

“Thanks to Sebas, we have collected plenty of information. There is no reason to linger here any longer. Thus, we will return to Nazarick. Sebas, I will leave it to you to take care of that woman. I would like to say that so long as your loyalty has not changed, I won’t interfere, but we will need to examine her a little before letting her go. It would be problematic if she decided to go around telling wild stories, wouldn’t it Demiurge?”

“Yes, it is indeed so. As long as unknown enemies exists, we must prevent any information leak about us if possible.”

“Then what should we do?”

“...May I suggest testing her first?”

“A sound idea… Sebas, let us postpone the matter on how to deal with Tsuare just a bit longer. We will not kill her, but that is no guarantee either.”

Sebas could not hide his surprise. Since these words implied that Tsuare’s fate was still unclear, did this mean that even the Great Ruler of Nazarick was unable to make an immediate decision?

“Ainz-sama, is it due to my mistakes that we are retreating from this mansion — the capital?”

“...It is so, but not so as well. As I stated earlier, we have already obtained all the information we need. As long as there is no reason to remain undercover here, I have judged that it would be safer to simply retreat. Demiurge, I shall take Victim and return first.”

Ainz received the angelic fetus and activated his magic.

“「Greater Teleportation」!”

Ainz fluttered his robe like an actor as the magic activated. His figure appeared as if it had been sucked in by a black hole and disappeared completely. For a moment, Sebas was confused at Ainz’ new act that he had never seen before, but regained his composure.

“Demiurge, she appears to be very tired, so I want to let her rest for a bit. I believe there won’t be any problem now if I carried her?”

“...I suppose you’re correct, Sebas.”

Demiurge smiled devilishly and gently motioned towards the door as if he was ushering him out.

“But I want you to keep in mind that we will call her again if necessary. This might be unnecessary, but I don’t want to go on a fox hunt in the capital.”

“...Please follow me.”

“...Yes.”

Tsuare answered with cracking voice and followed Sebas with her barely moving legs. Their footsteps echoed across the hallway. They walked in silence and soon reached Tsuare’s room. It wasn’t far, but it felt as if they had walked quite some distance. Only after having arrived in front of the door, Sebas spoke as if he had finally made up his mind.

“I won’t apologize for it.”

He could feel Tsuare flinch behind him.

“But, it is my fault that there was an order to eliminate you. If I had been more cautious, it would not have happened.”

“...Sebas-sama.”

“I am a loyal servant to Ainz-sama and the 41 Supreme Beings. Even if similar situation occurs, I will follow their order… So please, be happy amongst the humans. I will petition him to allow it… Ainz-sama can manipulate memories, so ask him to erase all your bad memories and be happy.”

“...Including memories of you?”

“...Of me as well. Nothing good will happen if you remember me.”

“And what exactly is good for me?”

Sebas felt strong will in Tsuare’s words, and turned around to face her. What Sebas came face-to-face with was a woman who was still teary, but had strong will in her gaze. He feebly thought of words to convince her. Nazarick was indeed an amazing place blessed by the Supreme Beings. However, that thought was limited to the creations of the 41 Supreme Beings and NPCs of Nazarick. It was not a place where talentless and talentless human beings could survive. It was also not a place which would accept a weak and worthless being like Tsuare either. It was impossible without the blessings of the Master. So, Sebas spoke.

“...I have told you to be happy amongst other humans.”

“My happiness is being together with Sebas-sama. So, please, take me with you.”

Sebas felt a bit of sympathy for Tsuare.

“...You seem to take joy even in the most insignificant things. You are simply thinking that because of the hell you have been through.”

Because she had experienced the worst, she felt happy even in an inferior condition. Sebas judged so, but Tsuare denied it with a smile.

“...I don’t think this place is a hell. I can eat until I’m full and I can get proper work… I was born and raised in a small village, life was hard there as well.”

For a moment, Tsuare looked as she was looking into the distance before she faced Sebas once again.

“We worked our land even when we were hungry, but the local lord took most of our crops. There wasn’t enough left to feed ourselves. Plus, we were just toys to him. Even when I was screaming, he was raping me while laughing. While laughing. I was just—”

“— I understand.”

Sebas hugged Tsuare, who was rigidly laughing and gently wrapped his arms around her shoulder. In that moment, he could feel her tears flowing out as if a floodgate had been opened. There was no way that what she had experienced and had seen was everything there was in the world. But for Tsuare, the human world was like that.

Sebas was thinking to himself. What would be the best alternative? There was only one answer. However, there was also a high chance of incurring his Master’s wrath and then he would have to kill Tsuare.

“There is a chance that you will die.”

“If it’s by your hands, someone who saved me when I was going to die there and then…”

Sebas came to a decision and steeled himself when he saw Tsuare’s expression.

“Very well, Tsuare. I shall ask Ainz-sama to take you to Nazarick.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s a little early to thank me. If he orders me to kill you as a result—”

“— I am already prepared.”

“Is that… so.”

Sebas relaxed his arms and tried to move away, but Tsuare did not let go. She looked up at him while holding tightly onto his clothes. In those eyes were looks of expectation. Sebas had his own guess, but could not confirm what those expectations were. Besides, there was something to confirm.

“I want to make one thing certain. Will you have no regrets leaving the human world? Will you ever want to return to it?”

Just because she goes to Nazarick doesn’t mean that she will never see human society again. There was no particular reason to imprison her either, but that didn’t mean there is no possibility for it either.

“...I wanted to see my younger sister once again… But I don’t particularly want to remember the past…”

“I understand. Then wait in this room. I will meet with Ainz-sama.”

“I will.”

Tsuare let go Sebas and wrapped her arms around his neck. Ignoring Sebas, who was confused about what she was doing, she stood on the tips of her toes. For a moment, Sebas and Tsuare’s lips met each other. It was only for a brief moment that their soft lips met before Tsuare moved away.

“It was electrifying.”

Tsuare moved away while touching her lips with both of her hands.

“It was my first time having a happy kiss.”

Sebas could not say anything, but Tsuare smiled happily.

“Then I will wait here. Please, take care, Sebas-sama.”

“Ah, yes… I will take care of this shortly.”

“Did something happen? Your face is red.”

It was the first thing Sebas heard when he came back to the room. On the mention that his face was red, he breathed deeply. To show inconsistencies in one’s emotions was not fitting for someone who was about to enter into an audience with the Master. Suppressing his left hand, which unconsciously tried to touch his lips, Sebas put on the perfect face.

“There is nothing, Demiurge-sama.”

“There is no need to use -sama for me. Same goes for when we are in front of the Supreme Being, Ainz-sama, as well. What about you, Cocytus?”

“Doesn’t. Matter.”

Sebas showed that he understood the two Guardians.

After five minutes, the room distorted. When the distortion was over, someone was standing there. It was Ainz. He did not have the ‘Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown’ he had a moment ago and Victim was nowhere to be seen either. Sebas, Cocytus, Demiurge, Solution. All four in the room bent their knee and bowed.

“You did well coming here.”

Ainz walked to the back of the desk and sat.

“Stand.”

All four stood up to see Ainz who appeared to be in good mood.

“Now, Demiurge. Didn’t this incident show you that you are too careful? I never doubted that Sebas would betray us even for a second. You’re all too cautious. Did we not confirm it in the Throne Room in the first place?”

“I apologize for making you worry. For Ainz-sama to be willing to go along with my worthless suggestion, I am forever grateful.”

“It’s fine. Even I make mistakes. If I know that Demiurge is offering a second opinion, I can rest easy. Furthermore, I am not such a small-minded person to rebuke words of advice.”

Ainz turned away from Demiurge who was bowing deeply.

“Then we need to talk about what to do with that human woman, Sebas.”

Sebas tensed up.

“Yes.”

He carefully surveyed Ainz's expression as he squeezed out his words.

"What do you plan on doing with Tsuare?"

Intermittent silence came before the conversation continued.

"Let's see. I believe I mentioned that if we simply let her go, information concerning Nazarick may spread?"
Demiurge nodded at Ainz's glance.

"That would be the case, Ainz-sama. What do you plan to do with her?"
"I will manipulate her memory. Then… give her some money and let her loose somewhere appropriate."
"Ainz-sama, I think killing her will be the easiest solution."

Solution nodded as if she agreed with Demiurge. On these objections, Ainz sunk into deep thoughts once again. If two people agreed… it may be decided that way. Sebas was taken aback on the inside. If the Master had made a decision, it would be difficult to overturn it. Even if he is forgiven for it, he will lose all standings with Demiurge, Cocytus and Solution. If he disagreed carelessly, he risked earning Ainz's displeasure.

But now was the time to speak.

Sebas tried to offer an opinion contrary to Demiurge's, but did not have the chance. It was because Ainz spoke before he could.

"...There is no need, Demiurge. I don't like killing somebody without a proper reason to do so. Even if it's a weakling, you can't use them if they are dead. If they are alive, they will always have some sort of use.”

Sebas held back his sigh of relief. Tsuare’s fate had yet to be decided. There was still a chance.

“I understand… Then should I let her work in my breeding pens?”

“Ah, where you were raising your Chimaeras? Speaking of which, are they suitable for consumption? We need to work on food production for Nazarick as well.”
Demiurge’s gaze avoided looking at Ainz who was murmuring “Chimaera steak… No, Chimaera hamburger…” and wandered around before returning.

“... The meat’s quality is not fit to be used for consumption in glorious Nazarick…”

Demiurge smiled while not recommending it.

“Of course, we are butchering the dead livestock and feeding it to other livestock. Since it would be difficult to eat whole, we grind it up first.”

“Hmm, cannibalism, is it? I guess they are animals after all.”

“It is as you say, Ainz-sama. That is what makes them cute and playful. However, they are rather omnivorous and eat things like wheat as well. If it is not too much to ask, then may I ask for you to give me any wheat you have left? We’re running low already.”

“They are the precious source for the scrolls. We can’t let them go hungry. Let’s see… Sebas, before you completely withdraw, purchase large amount of wheat and send it to Demiurge.”

“As you command. If it’s large amount, I would like to borrow a warehouse and gather it there. What shall I do to transfer it to Nazarick?”

“Let’s see… Shalltear will use ‘Gate’ to move everything to Nazarick. Is it alright for me to leave everything else to you afterwards, Demiurge?”

“Yes, we will take care of it from then on.”

“Demiurge, your contribution to Nazarick is the greatest. Worthy of praise.”

“There is no greater joy for me, Ainz-sama. Your words give me more strength than ever before.”

“Well, then. Are you sure that you’re not working too hard? You get called over every time something happens, operate the breeding pens for the scrolls, prepare for the creation of the demon king, and several other important matters. I’m wondering if you’re doing alright?”

Demiurge smiled contently. It was a genuinely happy face that Sebas had never seen before.

“It is a great honour for you to personally worry about me. But rest easy, I only get joy from my work and it is not too much. However, if I ever do decide that I need help, I shall request some immediately.”

“Make it so.”

Sebas thought about the true identity of Demiurge’s breeding pens and frowned on the inside. As a comrade of Nazarick who served the Supreme Beings, he knew only too well what Demiurge was like. There was no way he would operate a simple breeding pen. Even if it was a hybrid monster he came up with— Suddenly, an epiphany came to Sebas. He could guess what Demiurge was keeping in the breeding pen.

Was it okay to send Tsuare to place like that? Demiurge would protect her physically, but her mental safety was not guaranteed. The conversation between Demiurge and Ainz paused for a moment. This was the time to speak out. Sebas decided so and said to his master.

“Ainz-sama.”

“What is it, Sebas?”

“If it’s alright with you—”

He breathed in deep. This was a gamble. A very dangerous gamble. But he needed to do this.

“I was thinking about having Tsuare work in the Great Tomb of Nazarick.”

Silence spread through the room and Ainz asked Sebas.

“In the past, I’ve asked Cocytus a similar question. Sebas, what do we stand to gain from this?”

“Yes, first, she is capable of making meals. Currently, the only ones capable of cooking are the Head Chef and the Sous-Chef. Yuri is an exception. It would be beneficial to Nazarick to have others who are capable of cooking. Also, setting the precedence of a human working for Nazarick would be a benefit on its own. If we show that even inferior creatures like human beings can work for Nazarick—”

“I understand, Sebas.”

Ainz put an end to Sebas pouring out how much Tsuare would be useful to Nazarick.

“Sebas, I understand what you are trying to say. I was also concerned about the fact that we have so few who are capable of cooking.”

“But Ainz-sama, can she truly cook something befitting Nazarick?”

Sebas glanced at Demiurge with knife-like gaze. Demiurge simply smiled back at him.

Bastard— Sebas swallowed the word in his mouth.

Ainz has forgiven him, but Demiurge hasn’t. That’s probably why he was interfering with Sebas on the matter of what to do with Tsuare.

“That has its merits as well. What do you think, Sebas?”

“...Tsuare cooks mostly home-made meals. To say if it’s fitting for Nazarick… I cannot offer a solid answer.”

“Home-made meals. I doubt boiled potato is fitting for Nazarick.”

“I believe Demiurge is being short-sighted right now. Perhaps she can only cook home-made meals right now, but the Head Chef can teach her. We need to look for long-term investments.”

“Then, why not just have her help me in my breeding pens? Grinding up all that meat is also quite a chore.”

“I—”

Ainz watched the noisy scene quietly. Beyond them, he could see the scenes of the past unfold. The ghosts of their creators, illusions from the past...

♦♦♦

“Then where shall we go today?”

“To the Fire Giants.”

“To the Ice Dragons.”

“...Ha… Ulbert-san, don’t you remember that some people need the rare drop from the Fire Giant Boss, Surt?”

“It seems like Touch Me-sama is the one who doesn’t remember that there are people who need to kill the Ice Dragon to fulfill their class-up requirements.”

“...That may be, but Yamaiko-san needs the rare drop to enchant an item.”

“No, I’m not particularly…”

“You mean the ‘The Flame of the Beginning’? Then you would need ‘The Ice of the Beginning’ as well. Let’s go to the Ice Dragons.”

“...Thanks to all the cash items, it has a high drop rate now. Compared to the Dragons, Surt has a lower drop rate, so let’s get that out of the way first.”

“Then I’ll go buy the cash item for it now.”
“...But, but, but…”

“...How about going for some erotic monsters like Succubus?”

“Shut up, younger brother.”
“If it’s demonic monsters, I want to go get the Lords of the Seven Deadly Sins. Of course, we would need some more preparations.”
“...Touch Me-sama, stop trying to solo-play this. Considering the members we have now, it’s most efficient to go get the Ice Dragons.”

“No, no, isn’t it you who’s trying to solo-play, Ulbert-san? When did we ever care about efficiency?”

“Can the top mage and top warrior stop fighting…”

“They were like that from the start. Ever since I invited them to join the guild.”

“To be talking with that weird, pink slab of flesh, Touch Me-san is brave.”

“...Teapot-san, Peroronchino-san, should I use the Guild Master’s authority for the no weapon loot?”

“Didn’t some guild put up the guide for the Lords of Seven Deadly Sins before?”

“They defeated “Pride”, it just got uploaded today.”
“They say a World class item will drop after defeating all seven, since

they're World class threats."

"Speaking of World class items, why don't we use 'Calroic Stone' to make a golem core?"

"Nuuboo-san, shouldn't we focus on weapons?"

"Making armour isn't bad either."

"Shouldn't we think some more about this? Since it's an item we can ask the GMs for, we should consider it some more."

"Isn't that right? Momonga-san?"

"I know how to get more 'Caloric Stone', but we already spent so many minerals from The Seven Hidden Mines."

"To never be able to attain it unless we own all of them, it's a headache."

"Yea, as long as different guilds own different parts of the mine, we can't get it back once we use it. It's not like they'll just sit around while we take them over one at a time…. How about leaking this information to a place like Trinity? Some are bound to get greedy and come running for it. We can strike when they're exhausted from fighting each other."

"You want to sell the information to the Alliance as well and make them fight with each other? You really are a strategist, Punitto Moe-san."

"Speaking of the Alliance, it seems he's hatching another plan against them."

"What? Why?"

"It seems like they stole a World-class item from some guild, which is now really mad at them.”

“Oh man, though I think an alliance between top guilds like last time would be difficult.”
“—Then can Momonga-san decide?”

“That sounds good, Guild Master. What do you want to do?”
“...Eh? Sorry, I wasn’t paying attention… What were we talking about again? ...We’ll just go with a vote like last time.”

“No objection.”

“Me, too.”

“Then new gold coin to vote for Ulbert-san. Old gold coin to vote for Touch Me-sama. Now they will pitch their plans to you guys.”

◆◆◆

“Be. Quiet. You’re. Before. Ainz. Sama.”

It was as if Cocytus had splashed cold water on both of them. Both looked over at Ainz and the colour of their faces changed. It was impossible to read any emotion from the red flame that lit his empty eye sockets, but they could feel something strong coming from his gaze. Both acted before a strong reprimand came their way.

“I have committed a grave mistake in front of Ainz-sama.”

“I have no excuse for such poor behaviour.”

The reaction they received was an incomprehensible one.

“— Hahahahahaha!”

Bright laughter echoed throughout the room. Very happy and bright laughter. Sebas, Solution, Demiurge, Cocytus, no one could remember Ainz laughing so happily and blinked in surprise.

“Of course, of course, you are forgiven. That’s it! Fighting like that! Hahahaha!”

Sebas had no idea what had struck Ainz right now, but let out a breath of relief.

“Hahaha… che, passive skill kicked in.”

His master returned to a calm mood like a puppet whose strings had been cut. But everybody shared the thought that Ainz was in a good mood. Ainz spoke to Sebas with a bright tone.

“Sebas, I understand what you are talking about, but to bring a human to Nazarick… Very well, I shall see her before I decide. Bring her.”

“Yes? Ah, yes. As you command.”

Sebas was puzzled at Ainz’s strange orders, but brought Tsuare over immediately.

“Ainz-sama, I have brought her.”

“Good work bringing her—”

Suddenly, Ainz leaned forward from his chair. The way he studied Tsuare was peculiar. Wondering if it was out of displeasure, Sebas glanced at Tsuare. There was nothing different about her from earlier and couldn’t understand why his master was suddenly treating her so.

“...Looks alike.”

The small murmur that leaked out probably wasn’t intentional.

“...Welcome, Tsuare. But I will remind you that I do not give second warnings. It is because I respect choices, even if the outcome is bad. Now if you understand this, I will pose my question. This will all be over if you lie, and it will also be over if it’s not the answer I am looking for.”

Sebas could hear Tsuare gulping beside him. With such threats, it was impossible to tell what would happen next.

“Then, what is your real name?”

He could not understand the intent of the question. Why ask something like that? Sebas could see her eyes racing from side to side. Her attitude told the full story.

‘*Please answer honestly.’*

Sebas prayed in his heart.

If it was something she didn’t tell even to him, there must be something about her true name. Even so, to lie to the Master would only result in the worst situation. Silence continued, and after some time had passed, Tsuare replied in small voice that resembled mosquito buzz.

“T, Tsuare… Tsuareninya.”

“Last name?”

“It’s Tsuareninya Beiron.”

“Is that so… Is that so… Then I will ask again, Tsuareninya. Do you wish to live in The Great Tomb of Nazarick, in another word, somewhere I rule? ... The Great Tomb of Nazarick is not a place where humans live. I don’t want to say it’s impossible for them to live there, but there are simply no such things as humans there, so I do not know how suitable it will be for you. If you want, I can give you a sizable sum of money and you could live happily amongst other humans.”
It was an almost unnecessarily generous offer, but Tsuare did not hesitate for a moment to answer.

“I, I wish to live with… Sebas-sama.”

Ainz nodded slowly, and the flame in the empty eye socket weakened.

“Very well then. Heed me, my loyal servants.”

Everyone bowed their head and Tsuare followed suit.

“From now on, I shall protect Tsuare under the name of Ainz Ooal Gown. I could also treat you as a guest of the Great Tomb of Nazarick if you wished, you know?”

“T, thank you, but I wish to work alongside Sebas-sama.”

“...If that is what you wish for. Then I shall place you under Sebas’ direct command as a temporary maid. Sebas, assign her appropriate work. Also, for Pleiades, switch from Six Star System to Seven Sister System, and change the leader accordingly. However, we won’t move her and Yuri Alpha will be the temporary leader instead.”

Solution bowed deeply.

“And let all in the Great Tomb of Nazarick know that Tsuareninya is protected under the name of Ainz Ooal Gown, not to mention she will be a comrade as well.”

All except Tsuare and Ainz bowed.

“Is there any objection, Demiurge?”

“I have none. Your word is the law in the Great Tomb of Nazarick. However, I believe there will be those who cannot understand why you let a human into this blessed land. What shall I tell them?”

“...Strictly speaking, Yamaiko-sama’s younger sister, Akemi-sama, was a dark elf but still welcomed at Nazarick. Just because she is a human being, I don’t think there’s much of a difference.”

Ainz looked at Solution before continuing.

“If that wasn’t the case, we would probably need to kick out your youngest as well.”

“I am unsure if an immortal would qualify as a human being.”

“That might be so, Solution. Well, Demiurge, announce my decision. If anyone objects, tell them to come to me and I shall explain it to them personally.”

“As you command. I have no more questions.”

“Then I will confirm everything. We will start withdrawing from the mansion. All guards assigned to the mansion will return to Nazarick immediately. Sebas and Solution will tie up all loose ends in the capital and Demiurge will transfer the wheat. As soon as everything is ready, I will send Shalltear to use ‘Gate’. Any questions?”

Everybody bowed in silence and Tsuare followed suit after observing them.

“Then, Sebas. What will you do with Tsuare? Will you return with her, or should I take her with me?”

“I believe letting her stay with me would cause you the least inconvenience.”

“Very well then, Sebas. Solution, bring all the guards over. I will return with them to Nazarick.”

“As you command.”

After watching the three of them leave, Demiurge asked.

“Did you know of her from before?”
Ainz stood up slowly without answering. He turned towards the wall as if someone stood there and finally opened his mouth.

“Demiurge, I believe that a favour should be repaid with a favour, and an eye for an eye. It also applies to the debts I owe to others.”

Ainz took out a book from midair. The book had a leathern cover and was held together with metal wire. It was too shoddy to truly be called a book.

“There are some parts the Chief Librarian translated, but this is the original copy. This is a diary expressing the anger of a young girl… who had her older sister taken away by some noble.”

There were good sisters in a certain village. Their parents passed away when they were young, but they survived by relying on each other.

But the older sister was dragged off by a noble— a noble who had nothing but bad rumours about him. If the older sister had been able to live happily, the younger sister would have been able to put up with the parting, but the younger sister could guess what would happen from the rumours she had heard. Her older sister would be treated like a plaything and abandoned like trash once he tired of her. This was the truth and the younger sister left the village to find a way to save her older sister, because nobody in the village had tried to help her. Soon, the younger sister realized she had a talent for magic and tried to get stronger to save her sister. However, she passed away before she could realize her goal. The page with one short sentence was the last page of the diary. It was about a new comrade on the mission to gather herbs, praises about two adventurers called Momon and Nabe.

“Thanks to this diary, I have learned much about this world. This is my debt. I will repay my debt to you with your sister.”

Ainz put away the diary whose colours had started to fade due to its age.

“Then I have one request to make of you, Ainz-sama.”

“What is it, Demiurge.”

“I found a strange information amongst Sebas’ reports. I wish for time to investigate further.”

“Is there a problem?”

“It would appear so. I have a place I want to check out and I hope that I can make it there by the time you have returned, but I cannot say for certain as I need to find the place first… I know it is disgraceful to waste your time, but please grant me some respite.”

Ainz reassured Demiurge with a bright expression.

“It does not matter, Demiurge. No doubt you are acting for the benefit of Nazarick. How can I not wait under such circumstances. Go, Demiurge.”

“I am forever grateful.”

Part 2

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 15:01

The sun rose and Sebas' and Solution's busy day started again.

The reason for being so busy was simple. It would have been easy to leave the Kingdom without a word, but then all the connections and contacts they built up would have gone to waste. Thus they acted as if they were returning to the Empire. With Solution in tow, Sebas exchanged farewells with all the merchants and important guild members he was acquainted with.

Obviously, the conversation didn't end at parting wishes. It was obvious that people wanted to leave a good impression for future business, not to mention having an opportunity to talk to a beauty like Solution. As a result, each farewell took more than 30 minutes and the day dragged on.

"It took a long time, but the process of moving all the wheat from storage is complete. It seems we can return to Nazarick without a problem now."

On his words, Solution seemed to beam with happiness. Sebas felt that she was happier about completing the master's orders than the prospect of returning to the Great Tomb. As Sebas was the one in charge of collecting information in the Kingdom, there were not many opportunity for Solution to feel as if she was carrying out her duties.

At least the farewells were Solution's work as she needed to appear to be the one in charge. With her strong sense of satisfaction, she almost looked as if she was humming in joy.

As a matter of fact, because she was in such a good mood while talking to the merchants, Sebas was able to negotiate several favourable agreements, like the waiving of storage fees because they had purchased large amounts of wheat.

There are benefits to being a beauty.

Sebas truly thought that while tying the horses at the stables and walking towards the front gate with Solution.

Standing in front of the door, Sebas put the key in the keyhole. He turned the key as he had done many times, but there was no clicking sound of unlocking. Sebas frowned in surprised and met his eyes with Solution.

The door isn’t locked?

With a small push, the door creaked open. The only other person in the manor was Tsuare, but there would be no way that she left on her own.

“There are several new scratches around the keyhole. There’s a large possibility somebody picked the lock…”

Before Solution could finish her sentence, Sebas slammed the door open. He didn’t think there would be any traps, and even if there were, he would just smash them apart.

The manor felt empty since everything had already been cleared out. Setting his detection abilities to maximum, he scanned for Tsuare, but he felt nothing.

“Tsuare! Tsuare! Are you in here?”

He shouted while searching the manor. He had searched every corner but there was not a single trace. It was almost as if she had never existed in the first place.

Someone was definitely in here. Considering there’s no smell of blood, she must have been kidnapped. Then what would their demands be…

Sebas balled up his fist tightly.
He was angry with himself, carelessly leaving Tsuare alone in the house. As a matter of fact, he had been apprehensive about leaving Tsuare alone. After his encounter with the underground organization, he knew there would be trouble afoot.

However, he still left her at the manor because of her trauma and her fear of the outside world and strangers. Only reason why she didn’t act up while facing the Guardians was because she could not register them as humans. Tsuare’s reaction back then was an extremely normal reaction of a person who encountered a monster.

Even if Tsuare could’ve been left in the carriage, Sebas had wanted to avoid any possible complications and had left her in the manor.

Because the brothel he destroyed would need time to re-establish itself, and since it would take some time to plan an attack, Sebas had assumed that the ones behind the destroyed brothel would have needed more time to reorganize themselves before trying to take their revenge. In hindsight, it was a disastrous miscalculation, but it was too late now.

As he walked briskly down the hallway, he heard Solution call out for him in reception room.

“Sebas-sama, over here.”

“Did you find her, Solution?”

There was no way she did, because Sebas had checked just now. However with hope, he stepped inside the room to see Solution holding a piece of parchment.

“Something seems to be written on—”

“Please, allow me.”

Even before Solution could finish he snatched the parchment from her. Using the magic item to read the content, he crumpled the parchment in anger.

“Kidnapped. I will follow them and rescue her.”

“It seems like a wise course of action.”

Sebas’ eyes widened as he did not expect Solution to agree.

“However, Ainz-sama ordered us to return to Nazarick. Shouldn’t that be prioritized?”

“But he did not say without Tsuare.”

“Sebas-sama… If you act on your own again, it will be a bigger incident this time. Plus, how are you going to find them?”

“They conveniently left the time and place for a meetup. It seems like they belong to the criminal group that owned the brothel I destroyed.”

“I see. However I still need to send a report to Ainz-sama before you leave. If you had not touched the brothel in the first place, this would not have happened. That goes against Ainz-sama’s order of being covert. If Sebas-sama acts out again, it will mean you disobeyed him once again… Also, did you forget Ainz-sama’s words earlier?”

It was a poignant reply, especially considering who had guaranteed to protect Tsuare.

“Please report to Ainz-sama that she has been kidnapped and that you are awaiting instructions.”

Part 3

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 15:15

“Hmm hmmm hmmm~”

Humming along pleasantly, Albedo threaded the needle. She pushed the needle through, and pulled it out. After repeating this step hundreds of times, she had sewn a black cloth on top of the white figure. Next, she stuffed the white figure and it took on somewhat of more circular shape. Looking at the nearly completed doll, Albedo smiled softly. It was a gentle smile of a goddess full of mercy and love.

“Alright! Ainz-sama’s head is complete!”

She clenched her fist in satisfaction and petted her handmade doll head with the appearance of a skull. Small pieces of cloth were sewed on it to become eyes and mouth, which gave it an overall cute look. If Ainz saw it, he would definitely have been embarrassed.

“Then next is the body…”

She gently sat the skull plushie on a corner of her desk and stood up to grab another spool of white thread.

This was Albedo’s room. Originally her room was the Throne Room, so she had nothing in the way of a private chamber. However, Ainz assigned her the common room the 41 Supreme Beings used so that her work as Overseer of the Guardians would not be affected. Just like Ainz’s room, Albedo’s room was large. Albedo didn’t have many belongings with her, so the room looked rather desolate and empty. After two months of her stay though, it was a different story.

One of the reasons for this was the dressing room she was about to open.

It was a room full of Ainz. She had hand made them all by herself. The dolls were in the shape of Ainz and had different poses; some were full-body pillows, some were miniature plushies. This was Albedo’s top secret space and not even the maids who came to clean the room were allowed to peek inside. It was dubbed the Harem Room.

“Ku-hu-hu-hu…”

Albedo hopped around while letting out a strange noises. Then she flapped her wings by her waist and flew straight into Ainz cushion at an incredible speed. It was similar to a rugby tackle. Still hugging the cushion, she rolled around the floor. Because there were countless other Ainz on the floor, it did not hurt. Holding herself in the middle of three Ainz cushions, she laughed creepily.

“Ku-hu-hu-hu-hu, the newest cushion I made from Ainz-sama’s sheets… In another word, I’m sleeping with him indirectly. Ku-hu-hu-hu…”

Albedo buried her face in the cushion and sniffed furiously.

“There is… no smell.”

It was a very sad voice. If someone heard it, they would probably have felt bad for her as well. Because Ainz was an undead, he needed no sleep and his bones had no particular odour to them. He washes his body to remove the dust or wash the blood away, but his body did not excrete anything that could constitute a smell.

“Hm, hmm? This is… perhaps… Ainz-sama’s…!”

However, for a maiden in love like Albedo, it was possible to smell even the faintest of Ainz’s odour. Whether it was her own imagination or not was up to debate.

“Snort snort, sniff sniff”

The way she buried her face in the cushion and sniffed it repeatedly was resembling more of a pervert than the Overseer of the Guardians.

“Ahh~ I’m so happy.”

As the Overseer of the Guardians, Albedo had many tasks to deal with. These included stationing soldiers, constructing the defense network, checking maintenance inside Nazarick, and anything that concerned the Throne Room. There was enough workload to break a camel’s back.

So it was especially important for her to come in here to recharge and feel happy again.

“Ah, I want to see Ainz-sama again! See him again! See him aga~in! See him again.”

Albedo vented her jealousy of Narberal who went on a trip with Ainz while tightly holding onto the cushion. At that moment—

『Albedo』

She stood rigidly. She checked around her while shedding cold sweat before realizing it was a voice carried via magic.

“A, Ainz-sama! What do I owe the pleasure to?”

『I just heard from Sebas, no, from Solution with ‘Message’ that the girl Sebas picked up, Tsuare, has been kidnapped. Form an appropriate squad to support Sebas.』

Albedo remembered Tsuare when Ainz mentioned her. Ainz became Momon and left for E-Rantel immediately, but Demiurge who remained had told the vague details about her.

“Please excuse my rudeness for questioning your great order, but is it worth forming a squad just to save some worthless being like a human? If it involved those who interfered with Shalltear I would understand, but…”

『No, they probably have no connection with Shalltear. This time it seems to be a criminal organization lurking in the Kingdom.』

“Then even more so…”

『Albedo. I swore to protect Tsuare in the name of Ainz Ooal Gown. Do you understand what this means?』

The atmosphere changed from earlier. A burning sensation of rage could be felt all around the room and Albedo could only make a choked up sound.

『You understand! Right!! I swore to protect her with my own name! They kidnapped her despite that. This is an insult to my name and everyone else in the guild! There is no excuse, even if they didn’t know.』

The rage suddenly subsided at the end of the sentence. Because his emotional threshold had been exceeded, the calming effect had activated.

『... I’m sorry. It seems I became too angry at those scumbags. Forgive me, Albedo…』

Due to the master’s remorseful voice, she could finally calm herself down enough to speak. The Supreme Being’s rage affected even Albedo. Even if it was not directed towards her.

“T, there is nothing for Ainz-sama to apologize about.”

Albedo bowed deeply even though there was nobody standing in front of her.

『... Then I’ll entrust this to you, Albedo. Rescue Tsuare unharmed.』

“I shall do as you command! While rescuing her, I shall make sure to exterminate the vermin who annoyed you!”

『Then I’ll entrust this to you. Speaking of which, Demiurge should still be in Nazarick to receive the wheat shipment. He will be the one in charge…』

“I shall go myself—”

『No, Albedo. You need to protect Nazarick. Send Demiurge. Make sure their identity does not get revealed as well. I shall leave this matter in the Kingdom to you and Demiurge. Be cautious.』

“I understand!”

The ‘Message’ ended and silence returned. Albedo slowly stood up and proceeded to put the cushions away.

“...But I really don’t understand.”

In Albedo’s eyes, there was an unnaturally rigid look. She looked towards a corner of the room.

The reason she did not let any maids in the room was to make sure she could monopolize her Ainz dolls and that nobody could touch them. But there was another reason as well.

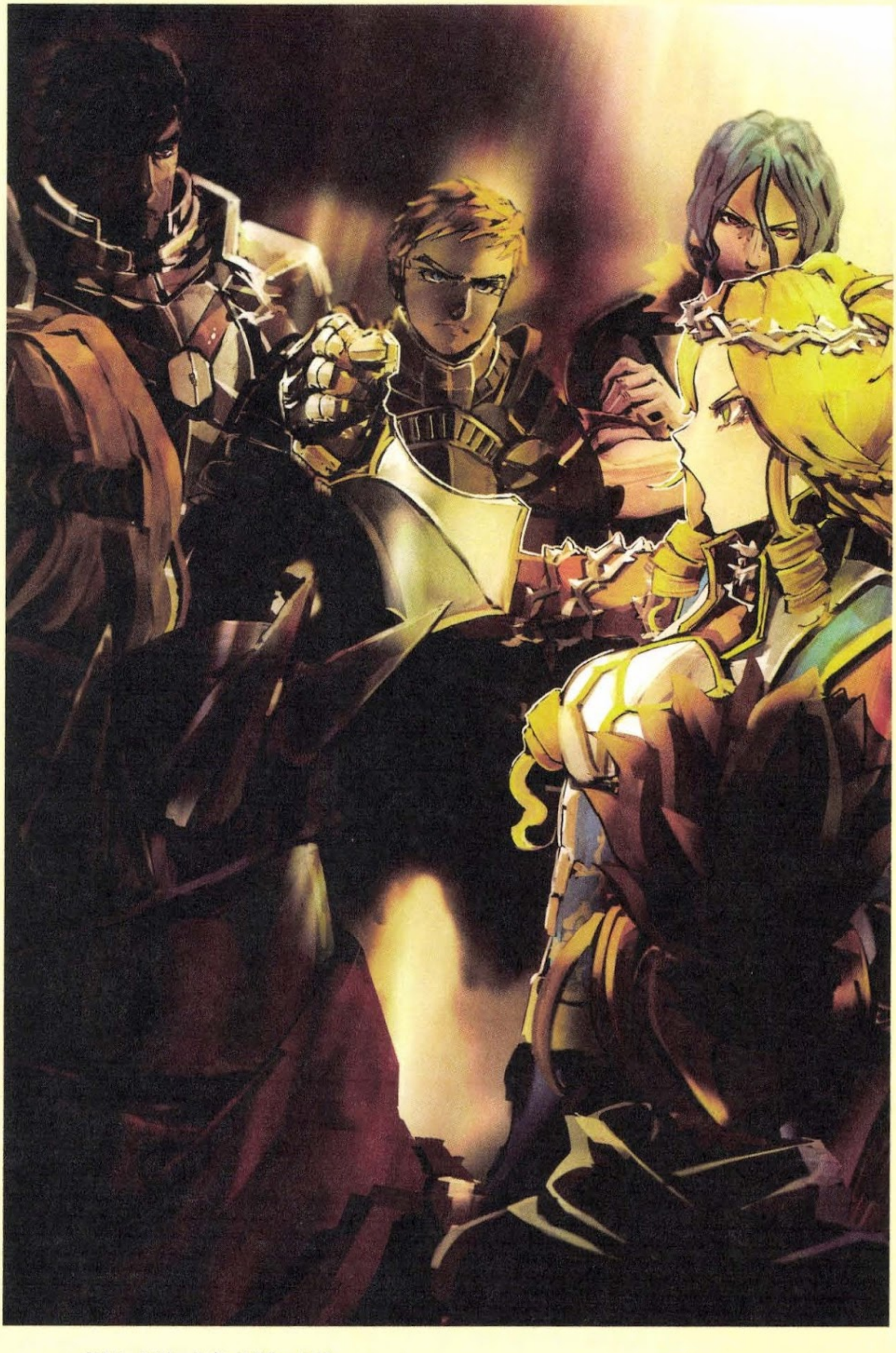
That was a flag with the emblem of “Ainz Ooal Gown” embroidered on it. The flag which should have been visible as soon as someone entered the room, laid crumpled in a corner of the floor. There was no sign of admiration or respect towards it, only hatred and hostility.

“Ainz Ooal Gown… How boring.”

In place of the flag of Ainz Ooal Gown, Albedo had raised a different gigantic flag instead. A flag so large, it resembled an opera curtain.

“This, Great Tomb of Nazarick is only yours. I, Albedo wish to only serve you. Ah… One day, I want to hear your great name once again…”

Chapter 7 - Attack Preparations



7章　襲撃前準備

Part 1

Lower Fire Month (9th Month) 3rd, 18:27

Brain stuck around until the guards Climb called for arrived. When he started to head back to Gazef's house, the sun had already set and his stomach stung in hunger.

...If I kept Stronoff hungry, I'd feel bad.

He pushed open the doors as if it was his own house, but it was only because he had permission from Gazef to do so.

As he started to walk towards the room Gazef loaned to him, Brain heard footsteps heading towards him. He thought it was probably Gazef, and confirmed it when the footsteps were heard coming downstairs.

"You're late Unglaus. Where did you go?"

There was no hint of criticism in his voice. Seeing that Brain didn't reply and fell into deep thought, Gazef's eyes beamed with curiosity.

"If you're okay with it, do you want to tell me about it over a meal?"

It was a true sight for sore eyes. Brain replied as he rubbed his stomach.

"That sounds like an amazing idea. So, where to?"

With a slightly surprised expression, Gazef guided him to the dining room.

“Do the servants cook for you? Or do you cook the meals yourself?”

Gazef smiled bitterly at the empty question.

“No, I’m quite terrible at cooking actually.”

He continued after pondering a little.

“Maybe the servants are getting old, since the food always seems under-seasoned. After a day of hard work, you want to have something strong, but the servants don’t seem to be too understanding.”

“The Kingdom’s mightiest Warrior Captain is forced to eat under-seasoned healthy food?”

Brain smiled as he teased Gazef, but Gazef replied tensely as always.

“Unglaus, I would love to present you with the gourmet under-seasoned healthy food of my home, but we’ll have to do with food I bought from outside.”

“If it is so, I must thank you for being so considerate.”

Seeing Brain smile, Gazef broke into a little laughter. However, his counter-attack commenced.

“But what about you, can you cook?”

Gazef’s sword of rebuttal missed and slice through thin air.

“Nothing complex and only simple stuff. It’s a big problem if you can’t cook during training trips or expeditions.”

Nodding slowly, Gazef brought a little basket that was tucked away in a corner of the dining room. The basket was big enough to fit a baby and a smell that stimulated the nose and stomach wafted into the air.

The two men sat facing each other.

After taking out several dishes from the basket, they filled their glasses with wine and raised them for a toast to each other. There was no particular reason they shared a cheers and gulped down the wine in silence. Brain took two big gulps before setting down the glass.

He let out a deep sigh and murmured with shaky heart.

"... It’s been a long time since I had a drink.”

“It’s the same with me. I haven’t had a meal in my house lately either.

"... The palace duties must be difficult.”

“Ever since I became the Warrior Captain, there seems to be always something.”

“Defending the royal family as well?”

“That too. As a matter of fact, that’s the main duty.”

After hearing Gazef’s stories Brain could feel how puritan Gazef was. He could afford to stray around from time to time, but he kept moving forward in a straight line.
‘A person like this is sure to be hated by the nobles.’

As if Brain’s assumptions were right, Gazef’s stories barely contained any mention of nobles. Despite being in a high position like Warrior Captain, most of stories were about his life as a soldier or about the royal family. There were no stories of some hoity-toity dance gala.

Changes were happening in neighboring countries such as the Empire, but in the Kingdom a large wall of different status stood between the nobility and commoners.

For Brain, this whole situation was hilarious.

He devoted all his time training to defeat Gazef, and he expected a fight to the death the next time they met. Now, they sat drinking as friends. As if his thoughts were read, Gazef smiled as well.

Their glasses clanged once again, but feeling a little drunk, they clinked too hard and some wine spilled onto the table.

“Try not to spill it onto the food.”

“It might taste better with some wine on them.”

“I don’t know much about taste… Unglaus, perhaps you are the same too?”

“Brain. Just call me Brain.”

“Alright, then I am Gazef.”

“Ok, Gazef.”

They laughed and clanged the glass once more.

Gazef’s stories were diverse and there were plenty of things Brain did not know about. As the atmosphere heated up, Gazef asked shamelessly.

“So Brain, just what happened to a man of your calibre?”

As if treating an open wound, Gazef treaded carefully. His gauging of Brain’s reaction was not to determine whether he was telling the truth, but out of genuine concern.

“Thanks.”

Looking at Gazef blinking profusely from receiving a thanks out of nowhere, Brain eased up as well. He took a moment to recollect himself before speaking.

"... I met a monster.”

“A monster? What kind?”

“Probably a vampire… Called Shalltear Bloodfallen. The attack I devised… to defeat you was deflected by her with just a pinky finger.”

He could see Gazef’s eyes widen.

"...Is that so.”

Gazef took a sip of his wine. Brain took a sip as well and recount the battle— No, the massacre that took place.

Of course, he did not mention anything about banditry. Gazef might already have guessed how Brain used to live like. However, he didn’t have the courage to tell Gazef that he was the kind of man who had done anything in the name of getting stronger.

Thankfully, there were no signs of suspicion in Gazef’s eyes.

“Will you believe me?”

"...The world is big and wide. It won’t be strange even if a monster like that existed. Looking back in history, there were beings like Demon Gods and Dragon Lords as well. But a monster like that… it’s above my ability.”

“Yea. I don’t know how strong you are now, so I won’t speak irresponsibly, but I will say it’s impossible for you to win against it. A monster like that is beyond our realm of ability. Even if two of us fight together, we would only last 1 or 2 seconds longer.”

“Hey, please say that’s not so.”

Gazef complained in joking tone, but Brain pleaded with all earnest.

“Gazef, you’re a Warrior Captain who’s in charge of protecting the royals. Please do not fight it if you ever run into it. Your life is valuable.”

“I thank you for your advice, but if that monster called Shalltear tries to attack the King, I need to stall for time even if it costs me my life.”

Even stalling for time would be impossible unless that monster decided to toy around with Gazef. However, if it was Gazef... he felt Gazef might be able to do it. Even if for just a few more seconds.

“Shalltear. Shalltear Bloodfallen is it.”

Gazef nodded heavily after asking about its description once again.

“Alright, after we’re both sober, do you mind telling me about it once again? It seems wise to collect as much information about it as possible.”

“Even if you do collect the information, I’m not sure if anything can be done about it.”

“If a storm is coming, then we need to prepare for it. Plus, who knows if other wiser people have a good idea.”

“That would be the best case.”

“I have several acquaintances who are adamantium ranked adventurers. Perhaps they might have couple ideas. … So, Brain, what will you do now?”

Brain frowned at the question. What should he do from now on. His gaze slowly wandered to his Katana he laid beside a small table.

It was a lingering regret.

It was all a lingering regret. No matter how hard he tried from now on, he could never defeat that monster. The dream of being the strongest was already shattered. His life had been a waste. He couldn’t live with his head in the clouds anymore.

It was a wild dream of a child…

“What should I do… Perhaps I should go back to farming.”

He was originally a farmer. He could barely remember, but he remembered the basics of farming from a corner of his head. Everything else was swordsmanship. To put it nicely, he lived his life with a single goal.

“That… doesn’t sound so bad… but, will you consider serving the Kingdom along with me?”

It was not a bad proposal. He could never win against a monster like Shalltear, but as a human he considered himself to be among the stronger ones. However...

“I’m not really used to working as a team. I’m not very good at grovelling either.”

“Do you think I do a lot of grovelling?”

“Ah, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply that you do. It’s just that I imagine all of the people who work in the palace to be like that... Gazef, your idea isn’t bad at all. Fighting for someone else… Ah! Speaking of which, I met a boy called Climb.”

“Climb? Are you referring to a boy with hoarse voice?”

When Brain affirmed Gazef’s voice rose in pitch out of surprise.

“You met Climb? He’s the Princess’ bodyguard, so I didn’t think he would leave her side that far…”

“I saw him while he was training in the city.”

“Training in the city… He’s not very talented so it would be impossible for him to be stronger than he is now. What remains for him would be to improve his physical strength. Was it that kind of training? If not, then I should give him a little word of advice.”

“Hmmm, with the sword… he is talentless. But in some ways, he was superior to me.”

Gazef made an expression for Brain to stop joking.

Of course, the difference between Brain and Climb was absolute, and aptitude could not be compared. However, in front of the truly strong, Brain realized it was like comparing how fast snails could race each other. Above all, having the heart to stand against the killing intent of people like Sebas must be praised highly.

The broken me would have ran away. But if it was Climb, he would never run away with the person he's supposed to protect behind him. Someone like him… might be good enough to cut the tip of that monster's pinkie.

Gazef had curious expression on his face, but Brain remained silent. Instead, he told the story of the assault on one of the brothels run by the Eight Fingers.

"Is that so… with Climb."

"If you think inconvenient things will happen to you, it's okay to just kick me out. Now that I think about it, it would be a problem for you if somebody who dealt with the underground world goes in and out of your household."

"No, it's no problem at all. As a matter of fact, I welcome it wholeheartedly. They're scum who dirty the Kingdom. I would have liked to stand at the front as you smashed into that place, if it was possible."

"Are the Eight Fingers that harmful to the Kingdom?"

"It's quite disgusting. They control most of the Kingdom's underworld.

With the money they earn, they buy out the nobles and exploit the commoners as well. Even if we try to crush them, the nobles they’ve bought out always interfere. If we want to strike, we’ll need to hit the hidden facilities spontaneously like you did, Brain. Even then, they hold more power than average nobles, so if we fail, the repercussions will be huge.”

“Between the hammer and the anvil.”

“Yea. It would be good to deal them some blows like you did. Unfortunately, it’s not that easy.”

“What about invoking the Royalty’s authority?”

“It’d be impossible due to the opposing Noble factions. The real problem though, is that they have bought out people in both factions.”

Heavy atmosphere surrounded the two as they drank and ate silently.

Part 2

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 17:01

The members of Blue Rose visited the castle early in the morning. All of them carried a large sack and every time they touched the floor, metallic sounds echoed from within. It was their equipment. Because they were entering the Royal Castle, it would be problematic to walk around fully armed to say the least.

Released from the burden of having to lug everything around, everybody stretched their shoulders and arms. The leader, Lakyus Alvein Dale Aindra watched Renner with envious stares.

“So your duty as princess starts now?”

Renner did not have much political power, but still had jobs to do as a princess.

“Don’t worry, I can put them off a little bit.”
“My, my.”

Lakyus made a mischievous face. Renner followed suit, but went back to her serious expression once more.

“Lakyus, as soon as you’re prepared, I want you to carry out what we talked about.”

“Why? From what I heard yesterday, weren’t we going to attack one at a time in absolute secrecy?”

Evileye, the mask wearing mage style magic caster asked.

She did not take off her mask even though she was in the royal palace. The only reason such suspicious attire was permitted was due to the fact of her being an adamantium ranked adventurer, the peak of humanity's finest. Also, the fact that the leader of the group, Lakyus, was nobility helped out as well.

“Actually, an unforeseen problem came up last night, so we need to adjust our plans accordingly. Evileye-san, yesterday….”

Renner told them about the attack on the brothel last night. The congratulatory gazes from the Blue Rose made Climb stand even more rigid in embarrassment.

Truthfully, it was not Climb, but the two people who were with him who had truly saved those girls who were suffering in the brothel. Climb didn’t feel as if he had done anything praiseworthy. In fact, Climb was glad he was not reprimanded and felt somewhat relieved that the plan wasn’t completely ruined by his actions.

“You’ve done well, cherry boy.”

“Gagaran is correct. Capturing one of the Eight Fingers... is a great achievement.”

“...‘Undying King’ Deibaanku, ‘Void Executioner’ Peysilian, ‘Dancing Scimitar’ Edstrom, ‘Thousand Kills’ Malmvist, ‘Devil of Illusions’

Succulent and the leader, ‘Battle Demon’ Zero.”

Tia started listing the names.

“Deibaanku is undead. It’s said Peysilian can attack enemies that are quite a distance away. Edstrom uses weapons with special magic and Malmvist is a lone wolf that specializes in lunging. We already have Succulent, so let's ignore him. Lastly, a brawler who specializes in unarmed combat, Zero. They are all at least adamantium ranked.”

“Yeah. Having even a single one of them captured is a huge advantage for us.”

“You did well, Climb. But meeting and acting together with Brain Unglaus, you’re really lucky.”

Climb agreed on that point.

“Ha, taking down Succulent with a single strike. They say he fought neck and neck with the strongest warrior in the Kingdom, Gazef Stronoff. It seems he’s as good as they say. But personally, I’m more interested in the old man Brain claimed he couldn’t win against.”

“I didn’t ask for Sebas-sama’s residence.”

"...Hmm, Climb, maybe he was wary of you and didn’t teach you. Or maybe you weren’t quick enough and couldn’t ask him… Which is it?”

“It was both, Evileye-sama. Perhaps if I asked, he might have told me, but it’s true I didn’t want him to get involved further.”

"...You’re more diligent than I thought.”

“Yeah.”

The twin sisters praised Climb.

“But to never have heard of someone like that before, it’s incomprehensible…”

Starting with Evileye, everyone’s suspicion of Sebas only rose. Climb tried to divert the situation by making a rebuttal, but Lakyus gathered everybody’s attention by clapping.

“Now, now, let’s leave that subject for later date. If not for him, we wouldn’t have known the location of the brothel nor got a hold of Cocco Doll. Plus, Climb is indebted to him as well.”

“You are correct, Lakyus. So, Princess. Does changing the plan mean we are changing the place of attack as well?”

“Yes, Evileye-san. We will take all of them down tonight, in one fell swoop. If we take our time, it would only give the initiative to our enemy.”

Silence filled the atmosphere.

The only one participating in the plan was Blue Rose. Lacking the manpower, the plan was to attack one place at a time.

“Hey, Princess-san, didn’t you say we didn’t have enough people? Or did you find someone overnight? We couldn’t even hire any other adventurers.”

Ever since the creation of the Adventurer’s Guild, its motto was to defend humanity from other threats. So there was an unofficial rule that the Guilds would never take part in inter-human conflicts. If not, the Guilds couldn’t co-operate with each other in different countries.

There could be someone who was willing to do this kind of work if they asked around in the guild, but the guild had their own ways of applying pressure to enforce the unofficial rule. Punishments ranged from issuing a simple warning to being blacklisted from all requests and in the worst case scenario, expulsion from the Adventurer’s Guild. The adventurers who were kicked out of the guild and went on to take illegal requests were called ‘workers’. According to rumours, the Adventurer’s Guild even hired assassins to eliminate the worst of them.

Although Blue Rose was breaking the unofficial rule to fight against a human organization, Eight Fingers, it was being tolerated due to the fact that they were adamantium ranked adventurers.

“Even if we do bring in other people, utilizing the guards would be foolhardy. They already have their people inside the guards. Maybe for the final clean-up stages, but otherwise it would be risky.”

“Same with any of the nobles’ household guards. Who knows which one of them is one of their cronies.”

“The only ones we can trust are Gazef Stronoff and his warriors, no… I’m not sure if we can trust even his warriors.”

“It’s so hard to come up with a contingency plan because we do not know their true strength. But if this goes on, the entire Kingdom will rot away. We’ll just have to do our best under the circumstances.”

Renner nodded at Lakyus’ complaints.

Invasions from the Empire, an internal power struggle and now corruption as well. Climb could almost see golden sunlight radiating from the Princess in her efforts to tackle these issues no matter how bleak everything seemed. He truly thought that she would unite the Kingdom and bring happiness to its people, and he once again strengthened his loyalty to her.

All those who thought that she was just a pretty decoration, especially the nobles, angered Climb. But the angelic voice of Renner dispelled all his anger and he concentrated on the conversation once again.

“It’s just as you said. We will borrow the strength from a trustworthy noble.”

“You know one, Princess?”

“Yes, Evileye-san. I do not know many, but there is one trustworthy noble.”

“Eeeh? Who’s that Renner? I think you already know it, but if they’re not trustworthy, then it’s meaningless. There’s also no guarantee that they’ll send enough of their soldiers over either.”

“I have that covered. It will be alright. We’ll also enlist the help of the Warrior Captain.”

“Ah, the Warrior Captain.”

“If it’s the Warrior Captain, we can trust him. If the Eight Fingers already got to him, then there’s no saving this Kingdom.”

“Then Climb, call over Marquis Raeven immediately. We had a discussion earlier, so he should still be in the capitol.”

“The Marquis? I also saw him with the Prince earlier…”

Marquis Raevan indeed met every criteria they had set out, with the exception of trustworthiness.

He was one of six Great Nobles and his wealth could not be matched by any of the other nobles. However there was no evidence that the Eight Fingers had not already gotten to him yet. As a matter of fact, his wealth could have been attributed to working with the Eight Fingers. However, Climb quickly abandoned such thoughts. If Renner, his most respected master and the wisest woman, said so, then he would trust Marquis Raeven.

But unlike Climb, the rest of Blue Rose frowned at the name.

“Oi, oi, Princess. Are you sure we can trust him?”

“Rumors say Marquis Raeven is a turncoat.”

“A spineless man who’s constantly switching sides from the King’s faction to the Noble’s faction, who would do anything for a profit, even if it was for the Eight Fingers.”

“I don’t want the information to be leaked from there, Princess.”

Amidst the negative opinions, Lakyus clapped loudly.

"...Everyone stop. Hey Renner, Marquis Raeven doesn’t have a good reputation. Can we trust him?”

“It’s not an absolute guarantee. I also think he has been receiving a certain amount of bribes from the Eight Fingers.”

“Huh?”

Everybody had confused expression, but those who had their own suspicion asked.

“Diverting their attention with false information?”

“Used for assassinations. Give false information to focus the security elsewhere.”

Renner shook her head at the former assassins’ words.

“Tina-san, Tia-san, that’s not it. Even if he accepts money from the Eight Fingers, it doesn’t necessarily mean he wants to co-operate with them. Marquis Raevan was a better man than I thought… Climb, go get Marquis Raevan. He’ll meet with you immediately if you tell him that you destroyed one of the brothels and have captured the head of Eight Finger’s slave traders.”

Climb looked outside to check where the sun was. As it was still bright with morning light, it was still too early to request an audience. However, since great nobles were not the easiest people to have an audience with, it would be better to start early.

“Should we even talk about the head of the slave traders? I think it might be best to keep it a secret…”

Since even a great noble wouldn’t refuse a personal invitation from the Princess, Climb thought it would be best to reserve that fact as a card Renner could use.

“If we want to make him our ally, we must show our hand as well. It’s the best way to prove to the Marquis that we trust him.”

Climb nodded and bowed respectfully.

“I shall bring over Marquis Raeven as soon as possible per your orders.”

“Thank you, Climb. Now, since that will take time, would anyone like some red tea?”

♦♦♦

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 9:37

The Blue Roses already knew. Even if Marquis Raeven came, it would be after midday. Great Nobles held meetings with other nobles in the morning. It would be a different story if the King summoned him, but Renner was still powerless.

Obviously, this would be a lower priority for the Marquis. So when Climb returned early, they wondered if he had been turned back at the gate. However, when they saw the two men standing behind Climb, they could not hide their surprise.

One was Marquis Raeven. His appearance could be described nothing less than immaculate. He wore a doublet made from a beast’s, or probably a monster’s, high-quality fur, woven with golden threads. Around the buttons and the sleeves, intricate patterns were sewn in, and from the way it reflected light, there were many pea-sized jewels embedded in there. Clothing of the highest class worn only during important occasions, it truly suited him as one of the six Great Nobles.

The next person was a rather chubby man.
Renner looked at him with surprised expression.

“Older brother.”

“Oi, my younger sister from another mother. You look as healthy as ever… Oh, if this is the daughter of the Alvein family, then is she the famous Blue Rose? To see Adamantium ranked adventurers here.”

The man who entered without knocking was the second Prince, Zanack Barleon Igana Ryle Vaiself. As Lakyus showed signs of respect to the royalty, he spoke in a relaxed manner.

“I came because it sounded like an interesting discussion.”

“At your service, Princess Renner.”

“Thank you for coming, Marquis Raeven. Please raise your head.”

Renner stood up to greet her older brother who was higher in the line of succession before speaking. As Marquis Raeven raised his head, he had a thin smile on his face. It was a truly creepy smile and made others feel uncomfortable, but other kinds of smiles would not fit him well.

“Would there be a problem in sending the others to another room?”

“As you say, older brother. Lakyus, Climb, would you mind waiting for me in the other room?”

“Alright.”

Lakyus accepted without a complaint and motioned her comrades to the other room. They would prepare without delay in the other room. The Blue Rose and Climb bowed their heads and disappeared into another room. After watching them leave, Renner guided the two to the table.

“Please, sit.”

“Of course, Princess Renner.”

“Alright, my dear sister.”

One person sat down with class and the other simply plopped himself down. Renner poured a cup of red tea and pushed it towards Marquis Raeven.

“It’s an honour to have the princess pour it personally for me.”

“I’m sorry that it’s only lukewarm.”

“Hmmm, is there none for me?”

Zanack looked towards both of them with disappointed face.

“My, my... I thought older brother disliked teas.”

“Yea, I don’t like weird water dyed with tea leaves, but having nothing to drink feels lacking.”

“Should I tell the maids to bring something over? Would you prefer liqueur?”

“Doesn’t matter if it’s red tea. No need to tip off the maids.”

“If we act today, maids won’t have the chance to send information back to their family.”

“Should we not be careful? Women’s tongues are very loose.

Especially the maids that work in the palace. They're faster than they look."

With a smile, Renner poured a cup of red tea and placed it in front of Zanack.

"Hmmm… You've already tested the maids' information network, haven't you."

"What might you be talking about?"

"Well, it doesn't matter."

Zanack replied curtly and sipped the red tea before sticking out his tongue at the bitter taste.

"But, Princess Renner, what is the matter this early on? Of course, I am always prepared to answer your call."

"Thank you, Marquis Raeven. We don't have much time so I will be frank. I wish to borrow your wisdom."

With a light cough, she spoke earnestly. Marquis Raeven's eyes widened and had light of surprise in them. However, those eyes returned to normal once he calmed down again.

"My wisdom. If it's a problem that you cannot solve… I'm not sure if I can be of any help."

"I don't believe so, Marquis Raeven. After all, concerning matters within the palace, there is no one more talented than you.”

Marquis Raeven and the Prince shared a glance.

Renner almost never participated in the power struggles. However, what did she mean by “matters within the palace”? Marquis Raeven chuckled. When you are lacking in information, it is better to gather more rather than guess and come to a wrong conclusion.

“So how may I help you?”

“I wish for you, the hidden leader of the Royalty Faction, no, the one who controls the Royalty Faction from the shadows, to lend me your household troops.”

"...What?”

Marquis Raeven made an expression as if there had been a magical explosion right in front of him. Anybody would have been surprised if they were here. After all, Marquis Raeven was not a man who easily changed his expression. However, he could only react like this. If it was any other noble, he would have laughed it over. But this was a long concealed truth.

Marquis Raeven had for a long time been considered a rat who would go between the two factions as it suited him, but in reality he commanded the Royalty Faction and prevented civil war from breaking out. If the man called Marquis Raeven had not existed, the Kingdom would probably have already collapsed. On the side, Zanack held his breath.

He already knew Renner was incredibly smart, a monster with the shape of human. But without anyone to act as her hands and feet, she was in a way imprisoned in the palace. How did she come to that conclusion? In the entire Kingdom, Zanack had been the only one to deduce that. Both people immediately thought that she might be bluffing, but abandoned the thought immediately. From Renner’s tone, nobody could imagine that she is lying. Both were constantly dealing with people who were full of lies, and they were still unable to determine if she was lying or not. Renner ignored the flabbergasted Marquis and continued her story leisurely.

"...Perhaps I need to confirm it with the other great nobles in the Royalty Faction, but Marquis Volumlashu is leaking information to the Empire. If so…”

“Wha, what?”

“Wait a second!”

Even louder than Zanack’s cracked voice, Marquis Raeven raised his voice.

“Marquis Volumlashu…”

“You know, don’t you? That’s why you were making sure that the Marquise didn’t get access to too much information.”

Both men looked at Renner with their mouth gaping open.

Renner had murmured this with the same unchanging expression, daring them to prove her wrong.

“You, what…”

Forgetting even her title as princess, Marquis Raeven was in state of panic.

Marquis Volumlashu was one of the six Great Nobles and only Raeven and Zanack knew that he was an informant. The only reason Marquis Raeven had tolerated that traitor was to maintain the power balance between the factions.

Thus, he concealed this fact to the Noble Faction and made sure that not too much information flowed towards the Empire. He had accomplished this in complete secrecy thus far. Zanack only knew of this because the Marquis had told him. Then how did this little bird in a cage manage to deduce this answer. Just the mere thought of how she had achieved that gave Zanack goosebumps.

“How did you learn all that…”

“It gets mentioned here and there. Maids also speak of it sometimes.”

How trustworthy would the maids’ stories be, Marquis Raeven still could not believe it. Especially if his past memories served him right, he could understand what she meant by deducing it from what maids were talking about. In a way, this woman in front of him had sifted through piles of garbage to piece together a jewel.

“—a monster.”

A comparison truly worthy of women such as Renner flowed out his lips. Despite hearing a rude comment, Renner simply smiled. Marquis Raeven abandoned all thoughts he previously harbored.

She was worthy of being treated as an equal. His memory had indeed been true.

"...Very well, everything I know, I shall be sharing with you. Is this fine with you, my Prince?”

After confirming that Zanack had approved, Marquis Raeven sat straight up, facing Renner head on. His attitude was similar to Gazef facing an opponent.

“However, I would like to speak to the “real” Princess Renner.”

“What do you mean by “real”?”

Renner asked as if question was strange.

“In the past, I saw a girl. A girl with powers of observation that I could not even hope to match, a girl who spoke of things so complex, I could not comprehend. Of course when I had finally figured out the meaning and the value of those words, a long time had already passed.”

Marquis Raeven’s soliloquy continued in silence.

"...A girl who spoke something incomprehensible, that’s how I evaluated her. Even though I only thought of her like that, it felt as if I was facing a dangerous person.”

“A dangerous person?”

Renner asked quietly.

“Yes. Because it had been so brief, I simply thought it had been just my imagination. But I had truly felt that. Empty eyes that were thinking nothing of the world and holding only contempt for other humans.”

Marquis Raeven’s shoulders shuddered in response to the chilly atmosphere that filled the room.

“By the time I saw that girl again, her aura matched that of any other girl of her age. So I thought I was mistaken back then… I truly wish to ask you, Princess. I wish to know if my suspicion that you have deceived us so far is true or not.”

Two pairs of eyes collided with each other. It was as if two snakes were tangled in a fight to the death. Then suddenly, light from Renner’s eyes disappeared. Marquis Raeven made a nostalgic smile as if he had just witnessed a scenery from his distant memory.

“Ah… to think it had been that long…”

Zanack shed cold sweat at the scene of his sister turning into an ugly and dangerous monster that still had a smile on her face. He had already had a clue what kind of hideous true self was lying beneath that beautiful face. His assumption that she wanted to grasp power and destroy the Kingdom had been incorrect, but she was still a cancerous being of a completely different level.

“Of course, Princess Renner. Those are the same eyes I had seen in the past. You’ve been putting on quite an act ever since then.”

“Not quite, Marquis Raeven. There was no acting, I was simply satisfied.”

"...Your personal guard, Climb… Is he who you’re talking about?”

“Yes, it’s all thanks to Climb.”

“For that boy to have something in him to change you… I thought him a mere child… Just what is he to you, Princess?”

“You mean Climb…?”
Renner’s gaze wandered through the air. How much was he worth. What kind of words would truly express his value.

Renner Thiere Chardelon Ryle Vaiself

If her existence could be summed up in one word, it would be ‘golden’. The word referred to her beauty. However, few knew that she possessed an ability which would make her beauty pale in comparison. Her intelligence, observational skills, comprehension, creativity, leadership, and every other aspect concerning rulership was overdeveloped.

—If described in one word, it would be ‘genius’.

It could only be said to be a gift from god. Her thoughts, which could only be described as divine inspiration, were all created from combing through and observing countless information. Even if one searched all across the continent, no one could come close to her abilities. Even amongst the beings that transcended humanity, there were few who could compare to her.

Even in Nazarick, only Albedo, who oversees all servants and guardians, and Demiurge, who possesses fiendish wisdom and expertise in all things concerning rulership, could truly match her. Humans always make decision from their own point of view. In that sense, she could be described as strange or weird. However she had one fault. She could never understand why others did not know what she knew. If there was a someone who was on equal terms with her, they might have recognized her for the genius she was. If it had been so, results might have been different.

But this was not the case.

The evaluation she received was that of a young girl who annoyed others because she only spoke of incomprehensible things. Because she was a cute girl, there was not too much hatred for her and she received a fair amount of love as well, but the fact that nobody really understood what she said had a huge effect on her mental development, and slowly twisted the girl over time.

It could be said that she was lonely because she was a genius. Without anyone by her side who could understand her, her stress only increased to the point where she was unable to eat anything without regurgitating it. Nobody thought the Princess, who was only getting weaker and weaker, would survive. She might, indeed, not have without her puppy, and even if she did survive, a demon lord would have been born instead. A demon lord who could only look at things in terms of numbers, and forced sacrifice upon the few for the good of the many.

It was truly a simple change. While she was going out for a stroll with the guards on one rainy night, she picked up a puppy. The puppy whose life was saved thanks to its master showed something in its eyes for her. It was a heavy set of eyes. The girl certainly felt it. The look of admiration in all its purity.

She was used to looks of indifference. She was used to looks of disdain. She was used to looks of doting. However, she could not understand that gaze. That truthful gaze was a target of hatred, panic, happiness, unknown sensations and — a human.

Just like herself, she saw a human in him.

The puppy she picked up became a boy, and then a man. Whether he was a puppy or a boy or a man, that same pure gaze stared at her. However, that gaze was no longer painful. Because of that gaze, she could converse with others with some semblance of a normal person. She could interact with those ugly and filthy lesser beings. And now, Renner’s world was complete with Climb just being in it.

“Climb… Yes, it is so. If I could be joined with Climb… Hmm, perhaps if I chain him up so he can’t go anywhere, I will be happy.”

The atmosphere froze. It was a given that Zanack could not, but Marquis Raeven also could not hide his consternation. They had expected to hear sweet words filled with romantic fantasy befitting a beautiful young lady, but this was beyond their imagination. If she spoke of unfulfilled love due to difference in status, it would be understandable. But that statement was outrageous to say the least.

“Is… is that so. This is your true face. What should I say… when you were young, it always felt like something was strange about you, but now I know you’re not normal.”

“Is that so, older brother? I thought there was nothing strange about it.”

“Then why not raise it, Princess? They wouldn’t interfere… No, it would be impossible without an accomplice.”

“Yes, it would indeed be difficult to do while putting up a front as Princess… Plus, there is no use if it’s done by force. His gaze, I want to chain him up completely and raise him like a dog.”

There are few people who would be happy listening to others fetishes. Marquis Raeven especially wanted to take several steps back after hearing Renner’s desires.

“To talk about raising him like a dog… Does that mean you don’t truly love him?”

Renner looked at the Marquis as if she was staring at an idiot.

“Of course I love him. I simply really like his eyes. Him tied up like a dog as well.”

“I’m sorry, my dear younger sister, but that’s not love.”

“Love comes in all shapes and sizes.”

"...I apologize, but I cannot understand it at all.”

“I have no particular desire to be understood, but if you understand that I truly love him, that’s good enough for me.”

Strange. He knew she would be different, but this is too different. They’re currently talking about something that can change the fate of the Kingdom, yet they spoke of the Princess loving a mere common soldier. This was the more incredible conversation in many ways.

“Princess, if that is your personal preference…”
“It’s not a personal preference. It is pure love.”

Marquis Raeven did not want to make a rebuttal against Renner’s reprimanding tone.

“Yes, love… Sure. But for the Princess to wish to be married with Climb… At this stage…”

“Impossible. Do you also think that would be the only consequence? Even a whisper of this, and you would be sent off to marry someone immediately. Probably someone from the nobles’ faction as well, considering that they have the ear of our eldest brother.”

“Of course, older brother. If eldest brother inherits the throne, it would probably be the first thing he does. I think all talks about it have already concluded. There are nobles who always look at me as if I am theirs.
“I already knew that the Noble Faction was offering their support in exchange for the marriage, Princess.”

“But don’t you think Climb is pushing it too far? ...Even if he receives a title, Baron would be the most he can achieve. Even if he does receive a higher title as a special case, marriage would still be out of the question.”

“I know that myself, older brother. It would be impossible with the Kingdom’s current situation.”

Zanack smiled at himself. This could be a useful opportunity.

“Why don’t we make a trade then? If I become the King, I’ll marry you and Climb myself.”

“I accept.”

“Really? There is no going back on your word.”

“Is there any reason for me to reject it? It’s a gamble with the highest chance of winning. Ever since you came into my room with Marquis Raeven, I wanted to talk to you about it.”

"...You mean you already predicted everything?”

Zanack smiled bitterly, but his thoughts and expression did not match. He knew she was smarter than him, but he never guessed he would have been dancing on top of her palm the whole time. Logically, Renner didn’t need to tell them about her plans and thoughts. But if it was to draw out the proposition from him, it was understandable. Zanack hurled all sorts of insults at her inside his head. She truly was a monster.

“And older brother… no, Marquis Raeven. I have one request for you.”

“What would that be, Princess?”

“I believe you have a child, Marquis Raeven.”

“Yes, he just became five.”

Marquis Raeven barely held his face from becoming relaxed just by thinking about his lovely son. He wanted to brag everything about him, but saw Zanack’s wary face and held back.

“Please make him my fiance.”

“Never! I will never hand him over to someone like you.”

Marquis Raeven screamed out. However, looking at Zanack narrowing his eyes and Renner smiling the same as ever, his face reddened at his outburst.

“I have no excuses, your highnesses! I was just caught off guard…”

Marquis coughed once before looking at Renner again.

“Your highness, excuse me, but can you tell me the reason?”

“You would already know.”

“Look, younger sister. If you mentioned the subject…”

“You would marry my child, and actually make a child with Climb. My child would have a child with whomever he actually wants and that child would be his legitimate heir and you would go around pretending to be the mother. Is that what you are suggesting? It’s truly not a bad suggestion. Her highness can have a child with whoever she wants, and our house would be connected with the royal family, even if it’s all a lie.”

“I have no interest in titles or bloodlines. If you would just let me inherit a reasonable amount of wealth for my child, I won’t try to take over your household or anything.”

“I trust you on that.”

“...If it’s someone like Marquis Raeven, even father will be unable to stop it. The Marquis marries into the royal family, you can be with someone you love and I gain an additional supporter. Nobody loses anything, and if anyone betrays the others, all of us will go down together… It’s a perfect plan. But is this the kind of proposal you should be making to me…?”

“My, my, I already promised that I am going to help you. Plus, I think learning about this later would be even worse.”

Zanack could not answer because Renner was right. As long as they held on to each other’s weakness, it was an irrefutable proposal. Even if she was a little off in the head, a person with her abilities would be vital in ruling the Kingdom.

“Then your highnesses, I think it’s enough talk about ourselves… I heard you had a run in with the Eight Fingers? Even arresting the head of Slave Trade Branch.”

“Yes, it is just as Climb said. That’s why I want to launch an assault before they go underground. I managed to obtain information about the Eight Fingers’ hideouts around the Kingdom, so we will strike today. But there is one problem, we do not have sufficient manpower, so I was hoping you would be able to lend us your strength.”

Zanack and Marquis Raeven looked at each other. The first to speak was Zanack.

“Then where’s the place?”

Renner passed around the translated message she intercepted.

“Has this information been verified?”

“Of course, Marquis. I requested Lakyus to investigate it. I just received a report that it is indeed a hideout for the Eight Fingers. The problem is that the territory belongs to another noble.”

Calling it a policing act would be stretching it. If one moved troops inside another noble’s territory, it would be same thing as picking a fight with him.

“But I don’t expect any problems from it. Once we find the evidence that it is linked to the Eight Fingers, we can apply pressure on that noble.”

“Even if we don’t find the evidence, we can use that letter. Seems like everything is lining up.”

Three people smiled at each other, but there were no warmth in those smile.

“My sister, I have a small request as well.”

Zanack looked around. It was the first time he checked if there was anyone else around in the room. It meant that this was truly the important and secretive information.

“Truthfully, our older brother has been receiving some money from the Eight Fingers as well. I wanted to use this as leverage against him, so I went ahead and investigated if they had a safe house in the capitol. It seems they indeed do. I want to squeeze this place into the hit list as well.”

“It’s fine. This is the time to clean them out once and for all, and if we miss this chance, who knows if it will come once again. By the way, which Department is it operated by?”

“The Drugs Trade Branch.”

“Then it’s in a bit of danger zone. A couple of days ago Lakyus attacked one of the villages harvesting the drugs. If we don’t act quickly, they might flee.”

“What…? Marquis Raeven, so can you act immediately?”

“It would be difficult. I have my own list of nobles who might not be with the Eight Fingers. Even then, the only nobles we can completely trust are about two. I need some time to convince them. There’s also one other problem.”

“What is it, Marquis Raeven?”

“It might not be enough with just my household troops.”

Certain strong adventurers can sometimes take on an army alone. There were several theories why so many Adventurers were stronger than an average human being. The most likely theory was that when the body is in danger, the brain kicks into overdrive, producing effects similar to accelerated healing and ability boosts. Other theories included blessings from the gods, absorbing mana from monsters, but the common factor in all theories was that there is a sharp increase in mental, physical and magical abilities. This effect is more likely to occur when facing a strong opponent, so adventurers who have met all sorts of monsters would likely be stronger.

Against opponents like that, simple soldiers stood no chance.

“But if it’s your personal guards, wouldn’t it be enough?”

Marquis Raeven swayed his head at Zanack’s question.

“Indeed, they are all retired adventurers who were ranked higher than mithril, but the enemy is even stronger. The ‘Six Arms’ of the Eight Fingers. Every single one of them is able to stand toe-to-toe with an adamantium ranked adventurers. If they appear, it will become very dangerous. Though it would be a different story if only one shows up and we can overwhelm that person with numbers.”

“A-Adamantium…”

Zanack’s stuttering was understandable. The peak of adventurers, the adamantium ranked, were strong enough to take on thousands of men alone.

“Then we’ll ask Lakyus that each member of Blue Rose take on one place. I doubt more than two of the Six Arms will be at each place.”

“...Isn’t Blue Rose a five member party? The opponent has a total of six members, is it really wise to split our forces like this? There is no guarantee they will be in the capital either.”

“We want to get them all in one strike, but it will be difficult.”

Renner’s intercepted message mentioned seven different places. Including Zanack’s location, the total came to eight. However, there wasn’t enough manpower to spread it so thin.

“It’s a shame that we’ll have to leave three places untouched… but there is no other way.”

“How about sending those who finished their attack immediately onto the next three locations?”

“That seems to be the best option, your highness. However, freely moving soldiers about in the capitol will be a problem. How will we solve this?”

“I’ll try to talk it over with father. Worst case, we’ll have to give it up. Perhaps I’m being too greedy…”

A knock sounded at the door.

“He’s here.”

Normally it was a maid’s job to get the door, but since there was none, Marquis Raeven stood up to grab the door. However Renner motioned him to stop and opened the door herself. After confirming who was there, Renner looked towards the two men with happy face.

“He is the one who will help us with the sixth place.”

Despite being uncomfortable, the man who came in guided by Renner was the Royal Warrior Captain, Gazef Stronoff.

Part 3

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 21:00

Climb held a black mass in his hand. It wiggled ever so slightly. The black mass was solid, but took on the shape of an extremely soft object that was being pulled by gravity. Climb smashed the strange looking bead against his armour. The bead burst against Climb’s white armour with liquidy noise and splashed black spots all over Climb’s armour.

Some would have suspected that there was black ink inside the bead. The effect of the bead did not end there. The black spots started wiggling and then started to spread throughout his armour, covering the surface with black substance. In mere seconds Climb’s shining white armour turned pitch black.

The bead Climb used was a magical item called ‘Magic Dyes’. High class magic items would often confer additional heat or cold resistance but what Climb used could only change colours. The reason he used this item was obviously because of his flashy white armour.

Lakyus called the leaders of every group and Climb went over to her. The one who stood in middle was a female warrior with all sorts of equipment. First in sight was the famous magical sword Kilineiram. The sword was about the size of a bastard sword and was sheathed, so he could not take a look at the famed blade which supposedly reminded the observer of the night’s pitch darkness. Even just the grip was beautiful. Inside the black sapphire that was embedded into the pommel was a brightly burning flame. The armour she wore radiated in a way that implied it could not have been made with materials any lesser than platinum and gold. It was an armour with unicorns carved all over it and it was said that only virgins can wear them and that it would never tarnish — the ‘Virgin Snow’.

Compared to her ornate and flashy armour, her cloak seemed to be made from simple grey materials. This item was called ‘Cloak of Rat Speed’ and increased movement speed, agility and evasion. It was an unimaginably powerful magical item, considering its appearance. She didn’t seem to have activated her famous magic item ‘Floating Swords’ yet. The reason why Lakyus still had her flashy gear on was because she could disguise them at any time with her own magic.

Those who stood beside her were all faces he already knew. The members of Blue Rose, and Gazef Stronoff. Standing side-by-side with them, Climb could only think that he did not fit in there.

Lakyus explained the plan for attacking the Eight Finger’s eight buildings. However, since there were only seven groups, the plan was revised so that as soon as a group finished subduing a place, the leader of that group and Marquis Raeven’s personal guards — all former adventurers who had been ranked above mithril — would rush to the last target and the remainders would mop up their originally assigned place. The goal was to neutralize and capture everyone if possible, but killing them if they resisted was authorized as well. Lakyus continued and warned everyone.

“Your opponent is the force controlling the underworld. There might be traps or unexpectedly strong opponents. Never let your guard down.”

Climb’s body shuddered. It was not because of fear, but due to the crucial role he had been assigned. Compared to the other groups’ leaders, Climb’s skills and abilities were extremely lacking. The only reason he had been assigned as one was because he was not an average soldier, and his personal helper would support him. Even the Marquis Raeven’s only team of former orichalcum ranked adventurers had been assigned to him. Under these circumstances it had been impossible for him to refuse.

Plus, the moment he realized why he had been chosen as a group leader, he could not simply sit around. Blue Rose, Marquis Raeven, Gazef Stronoff, and in case of something went wrong, Prince Zanack, too. There was nobody who represented Renner. Thus, by making Climb one of the group leaders, she wanted to show that she had a large part in the plan as well.

It seems to be the work of Prince Zanack and Marquis Raeven, but why would they do that?

The reason was a mystery to Climb. However, the mission of spreading the knowledge that Princess Renner was working hard for the people of the Kingdom gave him strength.

The little pep talk finished and everyone dispersed. When he went back to his group, the man who stood at the front of the group spoke with relaxed voice.

“Are you ready?”

That man was Brain Unglaus, deputy leader of Climb’s group and his personal helper who had been brought by Gazef.

“The members are all ready. On commander’s words, we’ll move out immediately. We’re going to be taking this route. Our friend over there helped to choose.”

There was a red line navigating through the streets on the map of the capital Brain handed over. After taking a look at the map, Climb looked at the man Brain was pointing at. It was one of the men from the former oricalchum ranked team. As if recognizing Climb’s gaze, he waved his hand in greeting.

Climb slightly bowed his head towards the man who was much older than him. Normally it would be frowned upon if a group’s leader bowed his head to another member of the group, but since Climb, who had no real strength to speak of, was the leader, he would need the help of others rather than personally stand at the forefront of the assault. While they were sharing a conversation, a humongous person approached Climb and spoke.

“Oi, cherry boy.”

He had hoped she wouldn’t call him that. While Climb was desperately thinking that in his head, he felt how the gazes towards him changed. He was glad none were of disdain. Some of them were like the gazes of adults watching a child, and some were of strong camaraderie.

“What is it, Gagaran-sama?”

Compared from the inn, she was covered with first class magical items. Her red full plate mail had spikes and eye like decoration around the chest area. It was her famous armour, ‘Gaze Bane’. Her gauntlets were little different and had snake decorations wrapping around them. It was an ancient relic that accelerated regeneration, the ‘Gauntlets of Kerykerion’. Around the waist was a war pick called ‘Fel Iron’ and the luxurious red cape befitting royalty was called ‘Crimson Guardian’. Inside the armour, where people couldn’t see, were the ‘Vest of Resistance’, the ‘Dragontooth Amulet’, the ‘Belt of Greater Power’, ‘Wing Boost’, the ‘Circlet Twister’ and even the rings had been imbued with magic.

This was the gear of one of Kingdom’s greatest warriors, Gagaran. Every single one of them was expensive enough to make one’s eyes pop. The only reason she could afford such equipment was because she was an adamantium ranked adventurer. Evileye, Tina and Tia also wore equipment that could be recognized as highest tier with a single glance.

“Nothing much, I just wanted to feel up the cherry boy’s ass some more.”

She probably meant that she was worried for him, but he really wished she would stop calling him that. He could take off a nickname like that if he wanted to in one of those stores, but he did not want to. Deep inside, Climb shed a tear, but Gagaran watched Brain with hawk-like eyes.

“Brain Unglaus. The man who fought toe-to-toe with the Royal Warrior Captain… Those stories weren’t a lie nor an exaggeration.”

“Blue Rose’s warrior Gagaran. You certainly are… strong. Truly fitting for a warrior of an adamantium ranked party. So, do I pass?”

Climb looked towards Brain as if asking what he meant by passing. Brain shrugged and told Climb what Gagaran truly meant.

“She came by to see if I am someone trustworthy enough to be entrusted with you.”

“Is that true?”

“What are you talking about… Why would I care what happens to you. It was just that it would be a shame if cherry boy died, so I came to see if you wanted to take care of it. Still, I can see that it’s no coincidence you caught the “Devil of Illusions”. A strong battle spirit. I can feel it even without sparring with you. If it was you, it would have been easy.”

“Gee, thanks. I can see the rumours about you were true as well. But it’s best to be on your guard. In this world, there are monsters strong enough to kill us instantaneously.”

“Oh-ho, you’re one of the careful types. Men like you aren’t bad either. You might not be a cherry boy, but how about it?”

“No thanks. I think it’ll explode from the pressure.”

Climb didn’t need to ask what would explode.

“That’s a shame. Well then, be careful Climb.”

Gagaran waved goodbye and strode away. Watching her walk away, Brain murmured.

“She’s a kind woman. Wouldn’t have guessed, considering her appearance.”

“Gagaran-san… No, all the members of Blue Rose are like that. Evileye-san may also appear mean, but even she’s a kind person.”

“A magic caster wearing a mask… Speaking of which, this Ainz Ooal Gown fellow that Gazef mentioned was wearing a mask as well. Is that the latest fashion trend among magic casters? …Hmmm? It seems we’re starting to move out.”

“It seems so. If we want to coordinate the time with groups that are going farther away, it’s about time.”

The two men could see a group that was already quite some distance ahead. Climb looked around to see if he could find a certain woman, but of course he could not find her. She would be with Prince Zanack about now. He knew how much work Renner had to do, yet wondered if his little sensation of sadness was due to his selfishness.

“Then shall we go, Climb?”

"...Yes! Right away.”

Climb commanded his group to start moving. Group leader Climb, deputy leader Brain Unglaus, four former orichalcum ranked adventurers, 20 soldiers from Marquis Raeven’s household troops, as well as several high class clerics that Marquis Raeven knew and people that Magician’s Guild secretly lent out came to total of 32. In the dark of night, they departed silently.

Part 4

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 20:31

“For him to send this kind of force… I must thank Ainz-sama properly.”

It was Sebas’ first words after looking at around those gathered in the mansion. With Demiurge as their leader, the Floor Guardians Shalltear and Mare, as well as Pleiades’ Solution and Entoma were present. There were also several of Demiurge’s high level subordinates, the Evil Lords. It was a truly powerful force. One may even say it was overkill.

“Especially for Guardians who compete for first place in strength to come…”

“As per Ainz-sama’s orders, I, Demiurge will take command… Is there an objection, Sebas?”

“Of course not.”

“Then I shall get this out of the way so there is no misunderstanding between us. Ainz-sama did order us to rescue Tsuare, but the reason we have committed such strength is to punish these ignorant Eight Fingers who committed a grave sin against the Supreme Being.”

“I know that very well. Rescuing Tsuare is only a secondary objective.”

“That is correct. I doubt this Tsuare has resistance against revival magic, so the only reason I will try to rescue her alive is due to your suggestion.”

It was not a pleasant tone.

“Even so, if she’s already dead, there will a bit of a problem in finding her. If I was the enemy, I would throw her chopped off head at the idiots that come wandering in.”

“I thought you were more likely to show them a scene of you torturing the hostage as an example, Demiurge.”

“A very logical conclusion. To tie up the would-be rescuers and torture the hostage in front of their very eyes… Just imagining it makes my heart race.”

“And what exactly is it that would make your heart race?”

Sebas hid his anger underneath his smile. Though, if it’s Demiurge, he would see through the smile. It was a thin act before him.

“All of it, Sebas. All of it.”

Demiurge’s slit-like pupils emitted a cold gaze.

“Of course, if it was me, I would even scheme for the rescuer to escape with the hostage, and the moment they believe they have escaped, I would turn the tables around. The greater their hope, the greater their despair.”

“That sounds like fun. If we get an opportunity, I would like to try that out as well.”

“B-but if they really escape, w-wouldn’t it be dangerous?”

Demiurge and Shalltear laughed.

“Mare, that was a funny joke you made. Of course we would ensure they can’t actually get away. Well, if they ever do, they would deserve praise.”

“Demiurge, did you already obtain the necessary information to destroy the Eight Fingers?”

“Of course, Sebas. I have all the necessary information.”

Sebas was honestly surprised. The time Demiurge had spent in the capital was extremely short, but for him to have gathered information this fast... Sebas did not want to imagine what kind of method Demiurge used. The only thing he was certain about was that if Demiurge was acting on the Master’s orders, he would not mess around.

“Now about the locations, there are quite a few, but all that remains is to attack them. If possible, try to capture those who looks like they have useful information, and make sure to remind these Eight Fingers of their wrongdoing—”

Demiurge suddenly stopped, glancing at Sebas before he continued.

“—That they dared to sully the most graceful and magnificent name of Ainz Ooal Gown. If we want to pay them back proportionally to the insult they have done to us, we will need to extract more information as well. Any objections?”

“N, no!”

“They need to pay for their rudeness toward Ainz-sama with death.”

“Of course, there’s no objection.”

The two Guardians and the butler replied. The Pleiades and the Evil Lords simply bowed without saying a word.

“Good, then Sebas. Can you tell me of the location they called you out to? I need to confirm if it’s one of the locations I have learned of.”

When Sebas spoke the address, Demiurge smiled.

“Should I be happy that it’s a match or be saddened that there is one less place to attack. It is one of the places I’ve scouted out. I shall leave that place to you.”

“Thank you. But there is a chance she may be injured. I wish to bring someone who can use healing magic.”

“To save her is the wish of Ainz-sama as well… Solution, since you have superior detection abilities, I wanted to leave you as a reserve, but can you support Sebas?”

“As you command, Demiurge-sama.”

“But, Demiurge, about the humans inside that building who kidnapped Tsuare…”

“If you leave any of the scum that tried to trample on Ainz-sama’s words alive, I’ll kill you myself this time.”

“No need to worry Demiurge. I will exterminate them.”

“I wanted to say this for a long time… can’t you two be more friendly with each other?”

Sebas could see Demiurge making an ambiguous expression from the corner of his eyes. He imagined that he probably made a similar expression. The more he thought about why he didn’t like Demiurge so much, the stranger it became. He was perfectly fine with Shalltear, who shared similar hobbies with Demiurge, but Demiurge annoyed him whenever they talked to each other. Even so, to quarrel with Demiurge right before the mission would be like spitting on the kindness of the Supreme Beings. Sebas deeply apologized to his master inside his heart and bowed towards Demiurge.

“I apologize for showing you rudeness even though you came to correct my mistakes.”

“...Well, it doesn’t matter. For now… Is it going to be alright for you to evacuate Tsuare immediately to Nazarick after you rescue her?”

“Of course. Are all the preparations made to receive her?”

“No problem~. On that point, we prepared accordingly~.”

Sebas nodded his head to Entoma who spoke sweetly.

“Any other questions? No? Then we’ll divide the members into seven groups and decide where each group will attack. Of course, Sebas and Solution are already assigned, but first thing to beware of… Shalltear!”

Demiurge’s tone suddenly became strong, surprising Shalltear.

“What, what is it, Demiurge?”

“Please wait in the back as reserve, since you lose all control when you’re drenched in blood. If you go out of control killing useless flies, it will be a problem.”

“It-, it’s alright! If I use Spuit Lance to suck it all in, the chances of that happening would be very small!”

“It’s still a no. We need to be careful with this and need to avoid the risks as much as possible. Also Sebas, I’ll apologize beforehand. Rescuing Tsuare and punishing the Eight Fingers is just stage one of this plan. However, I cannot tell you anything about the entire plan or stage two, because the moment you return to Nazarick after accomplishing stage one, you are no longer part of the plan. To avoid any information leaks, we need to keep it on a strict need-to-know basis.”

“I understand. Then I will prepare immediately.”

Once Sebas left the room, Demiurge continued.

"Alright, first, I will relay the important information. Concentrate and make sure you do not miss anything. Entoma, you can make illusions, correct? Then please use them as I instruct you."

"Roger~"

After listening to all the details from Demiurge, Entoma created an illusion in an empty space. Demiurge was fully satisfied with the illusion as well.

"I forbid you to kill this person. In the worst case, you are permitted to injure him if necessary but think of it as fundamentally not allowed. Especially you, Shalltear."

"You don't need to keep reminding me."

Shalltear puffed up her cheeks at being repeatedly mentioned and Mare smiled bitterly.

"U-umm. I-is it ok not to, uh, tell Sebas?"

"It should be alright. Considering his personality, he isn't someone who would randomly hurt people… but just in case, will you take care of this in an emergency, Solution?"

"Yes, as you command."

Demiurge nodded satisfactorily.

The last part of the plan was linked to someone who would bring huge benefits to Nazarick. If there is a mistake, then there was a chance that the ultimate goal of world domination, which the Supreme Being Ainz Ooal Gown has not said aloud, could be delayed. The moment the master said “I entrust everything to you”, mistakes could no longer be tolerated.

Despite having received direct orders from Albedo; Shalltear, Cocytus and Sebas have made mistakes one after the other. If this continued, the very abilities of the Guardians and the other stronger members created by the supreme beings would be questioned. Of course, the master did not show displeasure at their failure, and Cocytus’ failure seemed to have been part of the plan, but they cannot keep relying on his goodwill.

We must prove how useful the Guardians are to Ainz-sama by succeeding with this plan.

Was there any use for foolish subordinates that cannot perform their duty in a satisfying way?

And if the final remaining being were to disappear due to disappointment...
The mere thought made Demiurge freeze in fear.

Failure is not an option. We must show a result that will wipe away all the previous failures.

With certainty in his heart, Demiurge looked around to everyone.

“And don’t forget, the people who brainwashed Shalltear may be waiting for an opportunity to strike. Nobody will desert their post without permission. If you’re deemed suspicious by myself or any other Guardians, raise your two arms or their equivalent as a proof of your loyalty. Do not act in a suspicious manner. If you do, we may kill you immediately for the safety of the plan. Any questions?”

“Uh, I just asked a question, but can I ask another one?”

Demiurge gave Mare a gentle smile and motioned him to go ahead.

“Ah, yea. S-Sebas doesn’t have a World-class item like us. Will he be alright?”

“As Ainz-sama foresaw, he is to be the bait. If the enemy falls for it, then it would be great. Albedo is watching from the Throne Room in case the enemy falls for the bait. Also, for those who cannot use ‘Message’, do not act independently. I will watch over the entire operation, so come to me instead. In case of an emergency or if for some reason you can’t contact me, I have already told Mare everything about the plan and he will act as the Second-in-Command.”

“Wha… What about myself…?”

“Sorry Shalltear, but like I said, I can’t trust you completely, so you’re in the reserve. Haaa… your uncontrollable bloodlust can be quite a concern.”

“I got it, I got it, alright!!!”

“As soon as stage one is finished, we will enter stage two immediately. I’ll explain it to you now. This is the real deal, so pay atten— …What is it?”

A Shadow Demon wiggled out of Demiurge’s shadow and whispered new information into his ears.

“Is that so? It’s certainly last minute, but can’t be helped.”

It was a truly annoying matter but something that could not be ignored.

“Mare, this is a new information. We have a new Eight Fingers hideout to attack. I’m sorry, but I will need you to head there instead. You might not have enough manpower, but I will send Entoma as support.”

“Y, yes, um, please leave it to me!”

“Good answer. We’ll talk about the details later, but for now let me explain Operation Gehenna while everybody is here. This is the most important plan we’ll execute in the Kingdom, so pay attention.”

Chapter 8 - Six Arms

8章　六腕

Part 1

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 21:51

In the Kingdom, it was normal to sleep when the sun went down, because keeping the lamp lit would cost money. In countrysides, where most were poor, such practice was the norm. However, cities were the polar opposite of the countryside. Especially around downtown, all sorts of stores and people were active like nocturnal animals. The place Climb was heading to was a little different. Instead of a brightly lit and bustling street, it was an alleyway swallowed in darkness.

Climb walked along the silent street without any lamps. The reason he could navigate the dark street was thanks to his ‘Helm of Dark Vision’. The maximum range was 15 meters, but the view beyond the slit of the helm was that of midday. Furthermore, unlike plate mails made of iron, mithril-made plate mails didn’t rattle as much. Unless someone with extremely good hearing or an extremely skilled rogue was paying attention, nobody could even guess that Climb was walking around fully armoured.

The scouts were ready.

They saw their target when they came out of the alley. Tall walls surrounded the perimeter as if to separate the inside from the outside. It resembled a fortress or a prison. What kind of illegal activities might be going in there? He thought of all the dark activities that might be going on inside. The magical light placed on either side of the door failed to drive away the darkness that seemed be seeping out from the building. He could not see the building that was described in the plan from the outside.

“That’s it. There’s no doubt.”

Climb murmured while crouching down to hide himself, and a voice replied from beside him.

“It seems so, leader. The atmosphere fits as well. I’ll go scout it out.”

It was the voice of one of the former orichalcum ranked adventurers who had rogue class skills. Brain spoke instead of Climb.

“Be careful. There are warriors that can detect invisibility.”

“Of course, they are the Eight Fingers after all. I plan on acting as if there’s a rogue or magic caster of my level. Well, wish me luck, both of you.”

With that, the presence beside him faded. He could not hear anything, but a rogue of similar caliber might have heard the footsteps headed towards the mansion.

The only ones left were Climb and Brain.

The reason they left everybody else behind was because they weren’t used to acting stealthily. Full plate armours were loud and would have tipped off their location. Since a battle could occur any minute, they couldn’t take off the armour to approach either.

So those two came instead.

Both were warriors, so they couldn’t imitate a rogue. However, for Climb, thanks to the magic imbued in his armour and for Brain who could use martial arts in the dark, it was possible to act in darkness. From here on, it was up to the professionals. There was a reason the two of them got this close despite the danger: If the rogue was detected, they had to decide quickly if their group would attack or retreat. Now it was time for them to wait and see. Still, they had no idea what was unfolding inside. As time passed, only negative thoughts plagued them.

“Will he be alright?”

Brain replied to Climb’s concern.

“I don’t know... but we can only trust him. He is a former orichalcum ranked adventurer after all.”

“I suppose. He’s quite experienced, I guess.”

They lost track of how long they were waiting. Then suddenly, Brain reached for his katana. Following Brain’s example, Climb reached for his sword as well and heard the panicked voice of a man from beside him.

“Wait, wait. It’s me, I’m back.”

It was the rogue who went out as scout.

“Ah, it’s you. You came close but didn’t do anything... Were you testing whether I could really sense you with my martial arts or not?”

“Yea, I’m sorry about that. To test the renowned Brain Unglaus, it’s my fault.”

“It’s ok. If our situations were reversed, I might have done the same. Either way, can you tell us what’s inside?”

Climb could feel the rush of air and felt someone sitting down beside him. He looked to his side and saw nobody, but could feel the strange sensation of a faint presence being there.

“It seems like that place was set up as some sort of training ground. The courtyard was set up just like one. I had a brief look through the building and there were a lot of rooms. I think we can safely say that this is a building owned by the Security Branch of the Eight Fingers. There were couple of areas with security so heavy that I couldn’t risk approaching. Also, there’s some bad news, leader.”

The tone of his words changed the mood to a very tense atmosphere.

“These are the important points. There are prison cells in the building and a woman’s imprisoned in there. Also, there are people who match the description of the Six Arms in the compound as well.”

Even if the woman was unforeseen, they already calculated for the presence of Six Arms. So what was the problem? Brain’s question cleared Climb’s curiosity.

“How many? Considering you said ‘people’, there must be more than one.”

“Five of them. Since we already have ‘Devil of Illusions’, it probably means everyone else is gathered there.”

In another word, this was an impregnable fortress. The worst possible location. But—

“This may be bad for us, but better for the others. If they’re all gathered here, that means the other locations will be that much easier.”

It was the silver lining in this worst situation.

“Then what will we do leader?”

“There is nothing to do. This place will be impossible to take down. We will retreat.”

“Will that be alright, Climb?”

“No, not really, but do we have a choice? If all of the Six Arms are gathered here, then this must be one of the two important places and we can’t even check if it is. But considering the difference in strength, it’s inevitable.”

“That is true.”
“Then should I go in again to see if I can grab any documents before

we withdraw?”

“No, it’s too dangerous. It would be best to retreat while they still don’t know we’re here. What do you think?”

“Yea, I agree. Then what will we do now? Go to the other locations and help them out?”

“That would be the best choice. Can you inform the others who’re waiting then? We’ll wait here and see if anybody comes after us.”
“I guess there is no harm in being careful. I’ll leave it to you then.”
The still invisible rogue intentionally made walking sound to reassure Climb that he was headed to where rest of the group was waiting.

“...Nobody seems to be chasing him, Climb.”

“Then shall we join up with the rest and move on to the next location?”

“Yea— huh? Look over there, Climb.”
When he turned around, he could see the person he met yesterday approaching the building they were surveying.

“That’s Sebas-sama? Why is he...”

“...It’s hard to think this is a coincidence... What is going on? Is he one of them?”
“I don’t think that’s the case. I doubt you really think that either.”

“That is true. Maybe if he was someone who’s really good at acting, but I doubt he’s someone like that.”

“We should call him—”

As soon as he said that, Sebas looked directly at the two of them. Climb and Brain were hidden in the shadows quite some distance away to survey the building. They wouldn’t be easy to spot. It could have been a coincidence that he looked in their direction, but Climb didn’t think that was the case.

Sebas came walking at brisk pace.

It was at an incredible speed. Whenever they blinked, he had closed an incredible distance as if he was teleporting. Even though he was just walking normally, he moved at a speed that the brain refused to register. Then he came into the alleyway. To be more precise, he nearly flew over the heads of the two men hiding by the alleyway entrance.

“My. To see both of you here, what a coincidence. So what is your business here?”

“No, that’s something we should be asking you. We were planning on launching an assault on that building, which is owned by Eight Fingers.”

“...Are there only two of you?”
“No, there are more behind us.”

Climb asked Sebas who was murmuring.

“What are you doing here, Sebas-sama? Do you have business in that building...?”

“Yes, to be honest, the woman I told you about yesterday was kidnapped and is being held in that building. They called me out, so here I am.”

“Is that so?! Speaking of which, our comrade who scouted ahead said there is a woman in there as well.”

“...Where is he?”

“He should be coming back soon... Ah, just in time.”

The former adventurer returned with his invisibility worn off. He was wary of the old man with a gentlemanly aura which did not fit the situation.

“This is Sebas-sama. He helped us capture ‘Devil of Illusions’ yesterday. He seems to be acquainted with the woman you spoke of earlier. He’s someone we can trust, don’t worry too much.”

The rogue nodded as sign of understanding and talked extensively about the information he had gathered, starting with the woman. Sebas spoke with a grateful voice after listening to everything.

“Is that so, I understand. Thank you, it will be easier to rescue her now.”

“Don’t worry about it, old man. By the way, everybody is ready to withdraw...”

The rogue glanced at Sebas as if feeling sorry for having to retreat and leaving him alone despite knowing that someone Sebas knew was being held hostage.

“Sebas-sama. The strongest of Eight Fingers, called the Six Arms are gathered here... Can you take care of them all?”

The rogue frowned at Climb’s question. Climb also understood what the rogue might be thinking. The Six Arms were foes matching adamantium ranked adventurers in strength. It would be impossible to win against five of them. However, ignoring such doubts, Sebas replied lightly.

“If it’s five people like that Succulent fellow yesterday, there shouldn’t be a problem.”

The rogue blinked for a moment before taking Brain and Climb aside and asked them while looking at Sebas with pitiful eyes.

“...Leader, is that man crazy?”

Anyone who listened to Sebas just now would agree. Especially if they knew about the abilities of an adamantium ranked adventurer. But Climb, who had witnessed Sebas’ abilities, knew there was no overconfidence in that statement.

“No, he is that strong.”

The rogue looked at Climb as if he were looking at a madman.

“Brain thinks so as well.”

“What?! Unglaus, you as well?”

Brain smiled bitterly as he nodded at the rogue.

“That’s right. Even if Gazef and I fight against him at the same time, we wouldn’t be able to win.”

“I, is that... No, if it’s true, that’s incredible...”

The rogue still looked at Sebas with disbelief, but could only trust what they were saying.

“If we are requesting help from Sebas-sama... It might be inconvenient, but can you tell Sebas-sama about the Six Arms?”

The only time Sebas broke his gentlemanly aura was when he heard one of the Six Arms’ nickname.

“Did you say ‘Undying King’ Deibanock... It’s an unduly nickname for a foolish creature.”

Besides that murmur, the information exchange finished without a hitch. Climb asked then.

“So, Sebas-sama... Is it possible for you to help us out?”

“Of course. I came to rescue Tsuare anyways. I shall take care of the Six Arms.”

“In that case, Sebas-sama will rush in from the front and we will infiltrate secretly in order to rescue Tsuare-san. I’m sorry to leave all the fighting to you, Sebas-sama...”

“That’s fine. It would be favourable for me too, since you would be able to rescue her while they’re distracted and they won’t be able to drag her off through a secret escape route.”

“I understand. I will rescue Tsuare-san no matter what. Then who would you like to be accompanied with? I don’t think it’ll be a good idea to go in with everyone like it was planned...”

“Hmm... If we need to infiltrate, it would be best to be as quiet as possible. Then after we rescue her, we might have to fight our way out. If that’s the case...”

The rogue looked at Climb and Brain.

“If he could use invisibility magic infinitely, it might be different story... but I think going with only the three of us would be the best.”

“Is it alright for me to go with you?”

“Of course, leader. My warrior comrades aren’t really fit for infiltration because they’re too stiff in their armour.”

“I understand, then we will infiltrate with the people here.”

“It’d be good if our magic caster could cast noise cancelling magic, too... Well, if it’s for 3 people, I’ll ask him to cast invisibility magic.”

“Invisibility...”

Climb spoke in worried tone.

“Even if everybody goes invisible, my helm can activate invisibility detection once per day... but what about everyone else? If everyone can’t see each other and gets lost, it will be a problem.”

“Don’t worry Climb, I have a magic item that can detect invisibility. Even though it’s a one use only, I’ll be fine.”

“No need to worry about me. There’s no way I can miss the leader and Unglaus’ footsteps.”

“Then we will be able to communicate fine. We will give Sebas-sama some time before infiltrating.”

“I’ll be in your care.”

Climb and Brain were flustered at Sebas, who lowered his head. They didn’t do anything to deserve a bow from someone like Sebas. They were basically using him like they did at the brothel yesterday.

“No, we are the ones who should be thanking you. Since we came to attack this place, we are very grateful that you are taking care of the

Six Arms.”

“In that case I suppose we are even.”

They could not find any hint of negativeness in Sebas’ bright smile. Climb stood up feeling relieved.

“Then we will retreat and come back after magic is cast on us.”

Part 2

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 22:15

Sebas gave himself a generous amount of time to arrive, so he was several minutes ahead of the instructed time on the parchment. Though he was early, he stood in front of the gate.

It was a fence styled gate so he could see inside, but because of the trees, his line of sight was obscured.

“Hmph, you came on time.”

With coarse voice, a man appeared from in between the trees. Of course Sebas knew that man was there the whole time because he had activated a skill that detected all life forms within a certain radius. He couldn’t physically see him, and since it would be dangerous to rely on this skill alone, he only used it under special circumstances.

“Over here. Follow me.”

Following the man’s guide through the door, Sebas walked on the little pathway through the garden. For a garden owned by an underground organization like Eight Fingers, it did not have gloomy feelings about it. The trees were trimmed cleanly and he could tell they must have a fairly talented gardener. Following the pathway, there was large clearing resembling a training ground. Numerous torches dotted the ground and red flames danced about everywhere. There were roughly 30 people, mostly men and a few women, who were all smiling. It was the smile given by those accustomed to violence who could never imagine themselves losing. Sebas looked around the clearing. He could not find anyone who could present a proper challenge but he found the Six Arms he heard about from Climb’s comrade.

One wore a hooded robe. It was dyed black and the edge was sewn with red thread as if it were imitating a flame. He could not see inside the hood, but the aura was not that of a living being. The nickname “Undying” was not a simple word play, but because it was an undead.

The lone woman among the Six Arms was dressed lightly in thin silk. She had countless golden bangles on her wrists and ankles and they made a metallic sound every time she moved. On her waist hung six scimitars. The man beside her was flashy. He was dressed like a matador and held a rapier whose blade looked as if it grew out of a rose. It even smelled like a rose.

The last man was covered in unremarkable full plate armour and kept his sword in the sheath. A total of four people — their leader, Zero, was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps he was waiting his turn elsewhere. When the four of them stepped forward, their minions moved to surround Sebas.

“Old man, I heard you are quite strong. You defeated them all with just a single strike?”

“We had to secure our place within the Eight Fingers with our skills alone. It will be dangerous for us if we lose here. Succulent? He was an idiot to lose in front of the head of Slave Trade branch, even if that branch is now fallen.”

“So I have one question for you. Succulent said he lost to Brain Unglaus, but was he actually defeated by you and simply did not admit to it?

“Well, I never fought with him directly. I only exchanged greetings with him in the mansion and he was unconscious the next time I saw him.”

“Well, I guess it was only natural that he lost. If the opponent was the renowned Brain Unglaus, there’s no way he could have won.”

“Especially if he became stronger since the duel and is on same level as Gazef Stronoff, Succulent’s loss was a given.”

“But it’s not something that can be forgiven. We’ll take care of Unglaus and that shitty princess’ underling later. But you old man, who instigated this whole annoyance, you will die first.”

“We will break you. If we couldn’t, it would put us in a bad spot.”
“Look over there.”
The Six Arms spoke one by one and pointed to third floor of the building.

“There are several high-ranking people over there. They’ve gathered to see us kill you nice and slow.”

“Is someone called Zero there as well?”

“Well, maybe.”

The four smiled mockingly as if they were looking at a weakling. Sebas pointed towards the building and then lowered his hand. The Six Arms wondered what he was doing.

“What is that? You picking a fight?”

“Don’t worry about it. So, where is she?”

“Who are you talking about?”

The reply came with a smile that was clearly looking down at him. Sebas replied sternly.

“She’s the women you kidnapped from the mansion, Tsuare.”

“What if I say we killed her?”
“Are you guys truly that generous?”

“Hahaha! Correct answer. We’re not that generous. She’s going to be a gift for Cocco Doll. We have her wrapped up nice and tight.”

“I see...”

Sebas felt one of the four suddenly looking towards a specific place in the building. The only thing that mattered was that it wasn’t the place where he had been told Tsuare would be. Even so, he only needed to confirm it afterwards.

“Since everyone’s gathered here, come all at once. It’d be waste of time and bothersome if Zero escapes.”

“...This old man doesn’t mince words.”

“Are you that confident you’ll easily take out the underlings? It seems you’ve never met a truly strong opponent.”

“Those are indeed wise words. I wish to return those words back to you... but may I ask about something? Why do you think I am weaker than Brain?”

“Stupid question. When you become as strong as us, you’ll be able to sense how strong your opponent is. And you, old man, are nowhere near us.”
With the exception of Deibanock, the other two agreed.

“Is that so...”

Sebas could also approximately estimate the enemy’s strength by their Ki, but it was difficult to estimate one’s strength when it was hidden by skill or magic.

“So we’ll give you a chance. We’ll fight one at a time, so—”

“—I am strong.”

Sebas motioned for them to come at him.

“Like I said previously, don’t do something annoying like fighting me one at a time. If all of you come at once, you might last 10 seconds.”

“Don’t look down on us, human.”

Deibanock’s shoulders shook.

“Taking you easy? No, you are the ones who’re taking me easy. My name is Sebas. The one who gave me my name is the strongest warrior. The master I serve is a Supreme Being... but, I can see it’s no use talking about him to lower creatures such as yourselves. I grow tired of talking. Let’s finish this.”

Sebas took a step forward. It was towards the creature with the nickname that displeased Sebas the most.

‘Undying King’ Deibanock.

Its true identity was a naturally spawned elder lich. Undead normally spawned in places where many people died and they tended to hold a deep hatred towards living beings and focused on killing them. However, a few undead with sentience suppressed their hatred towards living beings and formed relations with them. Deibanock was one such undead. The objective of his unnatural life was to master magic he couldn’t use when he first spawned and to attain different skills beyond magic as well.

If there were similar undead, it might have been a different story. Actually, there was a secret society that only consisted of undead magic casters, but unfortunately, Deibanock never had the chance to meet any of them.

And so, he sought wealth in order to learn more magic.

In the beginning, he killed travelers on the road and took their money, but after losing to adventurers who were sent as a punitive force, he realized the foolishness of such actions and looked for new ways to acquire money. So he hid his true identity to join a mercenary company, but after it was noticed that he could cast ‘Fireball’ continuously, his identity as an undead was discovered and he had to run away.

It was Zero who approached him after he had just lost a way to make money.

He introduced someone who would teach Deibanock some magic and offered a reasonable amount of money in exchange for working under him. It was the kind of help Deibanock never expected. If he continued strengthening his magical power, there was a possibility that an immortal being like him would one day possess enough strength to destroy all life. Zero would have been sponsoring someone who posed threat to humanity in the future.

However—

Sebas approached him like a storm, curled his fingers into a fist and punched. Without giving him time to dodge or defend, Sebas smashed Deibanock’s head into pieces. His unnatural life was extinguished before he could understand what kind of wrath he had wrought. Sebas spat with spiteful effort that wasn’t like him.

“There is only one being who can use that title. The one who stands above all. How dare some lesser undead like you use it.”

While Sebas shook his right fist as if to dust off the bone pieces, Deibanock’s body disintegrated and the numerous magic items he had been wearing scattered in every direction. Amongst the crowd frozen with panic, only the Six Arms moved. Without experiencing a lot of carnage befitting for true veterans, they would not have been able to react. This was something praiseworthy as it proved that their reputation of being able to stand toe-to-toe with adamantium ranked adventurers was not just a baseless rumour.

Sebas’ next opponent was the woman.

“Dancing Scimitar” Edstrom.

The scimitars had ‘Dance’ magic imbued into them. Just like the name, the weapons moved as if they were dancing and attacked automatically, increasing the number of attacks several folds. But since the magic only allowed for simple patterns. It was not suitable to use as a main weapon. It was only useful for surprise attacks or support, and it would only annoy the opponent if she was fighting someone of equal skill. Because weapons could only be imbued with a single spell, it was common sense to use better magic than ‘Dance’. For example, Gagaran from Blue Rose only used magic that increased the attack power of her weapons.

However, for Edstrom, there was no magic more suitable than ‘Dance’. Usually, this spell was activated when the owner of the weapon used their mind to give it orders, but it was impossible to command a floating weapon to do anything other than simple movements if one was in the middle of a fight with their life on the line.

But she was different.

It was as if there was an invisible warrior there, one who could control the weapon with natural movements equal to her own. The reason for that was the strange way her brain was wired, she possessed two abilities instead of a talent.

One ability was an almost abnormal spatial awareness, and the other was to use her hands independently from each other to perform different actions at the same time. Some people were able to do this despite never having learnt to do so, but she was much more proficient at this and her brain was so much more flexible that it almost appeared as if she had two brains. If she only possessed one of these abilities, she wouldn’t be able to handle her swords as freely, so the fact that she possessed both of them could only be described as a miracle.

Amongst all the nine million citizens within the Kingdom, there was probably no other person who possessed both abilities. Carrying out her will, the swords left their sheaths and floated in the air. She only needed to focus on defending. The other five swords would be the ones attacking. This was the sword prison; a prison where death was certain.

But—

Even before the scimitars could attack, Sebas closed the distance and swiped with a chop at incredible speed. Sebas’ hand enhanced with Ki was sharper than any blade and her head flew instantaneously. Blood spurted from her neck and her body collapsed a moment later. However, the five scimitars were still floating in the air. Sebas’ chop had been so precise and quick, she did not feel her death. There probably wasn’t any pain either. Following her will, the five dancing scimitars thrust towards Sebas. Ignoring them, Sebas stood straight and spoke towards the detached head in a praiseful tone.

“To fight even after losing your head... I applaud your fighting spirit.”

Her lips opened and closed. What was he talking about? She couldn’t understand, but as if feeling something from his words, her eyes looked around and found her headless corpse. It’s a lie. It’s an illusion. There’s no way I can lose. I didn’t lose. The reason why I can’t move is probably because someone used magic. Someone say something. When she accepted the truth, her face contorted in despair. Her mouth opened and closed once more and the swords that were tracking Sebas fell to the ground. They showed no signs of ever moving again.

“Let’s go together. The two of us can take him!”

The scream came from the man wearing the full plate armour, who could barely suppress his panic. The armour couldn’t protect him from fear. He realized not just with his body, but also with all his heart, that everything Sebas had said had been the truth, and that this was someone he should have never turned into an enemy.

“T-t-take m-my ‘Dimensional Slash’!”

He intrinsically knew that he would die. He knew that he could never win against Sebas. The reason he didn’t try to run away was because he knew he would be dead within a few steps. If he fights, he will die, and if he runs, he will die. Since both were not an option, his attitude showed that he was a warrior nonetheless.

Sebas squinted his eyes. It was first time he thought he would need to be wary of an opponent. Sebas’ creator, the world champion “Touch Me”, had an ultimate skill which could tear the very fabric of space and time. There was no way his opponent would be able to use that kind of attack, but even a cheap knock-off would be able to damage Sebas.

“Void Executioner” Peysilian.

He received his nickname for the magical ability of drawing his sword from a one meter long sheath and being able to strike an opponent up to three meters away, but it was not an attack that really cut across the void.

The secret lay in the sword.

There was a kind of sword called Urumi. It was a longsword made of a soft metal which bent and flailed easily. What he had was a sword shaved to such an extreme thinness, that it was more apt to call him the “Thin Executioner”. Perhaps a more accurate description would be that of a long and thin metallic whip. He earned his nickname by whipping out his sword at high speed and slaughtering the opponent with just a flash of light.

Compared to the other Six Arms, it was much closer to a trick than a skill, but the fact he could handle such a difficult weapon was proof that he was a highly skilled warrior. Even the one called the strongest warrior, Gazef Stronoff, wouldn’t be able to handle this weapon as proficiently as Peysilian. However, the real strength lay in the fact it didn’t matter whether the opponent saw through the weapon. The scariest thing about the whip was its extremely fast speed. It was difficult, or rather impossible, to dodge simply by looking. A strike executed with super-high speed. For a human being who had no answer for it, it would have appeared to be a strike cutting across void.

—But

The edge of the sword, the super speed strike was stopped between two fingers. He did so in such a natural movement, it was as if he was picking up something he had dropped earlier. Sebas looked at the metallic object between his fingers and raised a brow.

“What is this... You were talking about slashing through dimensions...”

“Shawk!”

With a strange bird like shout, a rapier flew towards him.

“Thousand Kills” Malmvist.

His main weapon, “Rose Thorn” had two terrifying enchantments imbued onto it. First was ‘Grinding Flesh’. The moment the rapier came into contact with skin, it would tear the flesh around it apart. If the sword pierced skin, it would leave an even more massive wound with the flesh torn about. The second was ‘Master Assassin’. It was an enchantment that would turn even a minor scratch into a serious wound.

These abilities alone would be quite destructive, but there was one more secret. This time, it wasn’t magic, but poison. The tip of “Rose Thorn” was coated with an especially potent poison, a mix of several deadly poisons. Malmvist was originally more of an assassin than a warrior, so he fought like one as well. It was the kind of logic that if one was fighting to kill, it was best to kill the opponent quickly and efficiently, no matter the method. The result was a weapon that could kill an opponent with even a scratch.

If one didn’t plan for it, one would be easily killed, whether it was Gazef Stronoff or Brain Unglaus.

But that was also his weakness.

Because of his mindset that he would win if he could just scratch an opponent, Malmvist’s skill with sword was rather lacking. However, his skill in lunging was real and if only lunges were judged, it would be stronger than Gazef Stronoff’s strike. In other word, the Kingdom’s strongest lunge. Additionally, his numerous martial arts could even match the former Black Scripture member, Clementine.

But—

Sebas did not dodge. He did not need to dodge.

“...!”

Malmvist, who had just lunged with all his might was lost for words. He saw the tip of his weapon, which could kill anyone with just a scratch, being held back by Sebas' finger. That was correct. Sebas had blocked the tip of the rapier with his finger.

"...H-how did you?"

Blinking profusely, Malmvist could only moan after confirming it was neither an illusion nor a dream. That was all he could do. Common sense said that it was impossible. There was no way Sebas could stop a lunge that was powerful enough to pierce steel. His experience screamed out it was impossible, but reality told a different story. Even with all his strength, Malmvist could not push the old man's finger at all.

The "Rose Thorn" was bending. He tried to pull away so he could lunge at a different place, but Sebas held it firmly between his thumb and index finger. He could not move his sword at all. It was as if an immovable mountain stood there. When Malmvist looked at his comrade, he was pulling at his sword with all his might as well. In the middle of it all, a steely voice rang out.

"Then, here I come."

A moment later, Peysilian's head burst into pieces.

It was an attack that was rare to be seen from Sebas. Until now he attacked with finesse, but this strike was a thoughtless attack born out of anger.

He shifted his gaze towards his right fist, which had easily pierced through the head, sending pieces of it flying.

His white glove was dyed with blood and had a pungent metallic smell.

“That was unseeming of me...”

Sebas took his fingers off the rapier and removed the blood soaked glove. The moment it fell to the stone floor, Malmvist quickly snatched the glove with his rapier.

Malmvist might have taken pride in his comet-like speed, but for Sebas, it was laughably slow. There were several ways for him to take the glove back, including smashing the rapier and blowing away Malmvist’s head, but unable to understand what his opponent was doing, Sebas asked with genuine curiosity.

“Just... what might you be doing?”

“This is it!!! This is the magical item that makes you stronger right?”
It was a regular glove made of white linen.

A cracking voice, foam at the corners of his mouth and bloodshot eyes. Malmvist had already descended halfway into madness. He was trying to rationalize the unbelievable sights he had witnessed.

“You only need to admit that I am stronger than you are. What a troublesome person... If you wish to, keep thinking so.”

Sebas swung his fist towards the man who was laughing like a madman. After Malmvist's head flew off and his body collapsed, silence descended. Sebas quickly blew on his fist as if there was a speck of dust. There was not a single scratch on his fingers where he had used 'Iron Skin'.

"If I hadn't been so wary of some fake attack like "Void Executioner", it would have been over in five seconds, but to last twenty seconds against me, I applaud you."

Sebas pointed at the building where people would have been watching this grisly scene and gave an order to the hidden predator.

"Solution, they might have important information, so please capture them alive. Now..."

He looked at the panicking minions surrounding him with cold eyes.

"Ten seconds for all of you."

Part 3

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th, 22:13

Climb briskly walked along the empty hallway. Even though they had ‘Invisibility’ magic cast on them, thanks to his helmet, he could see the two people with him. Because of his helm, he even thought at one point that they didn’t have invisibility magic cast on them. However if he looked carefully, the fact the colours were blurry confirmed that was not the case. Though they needed to be careful not to make noise, they couldn’t afford to slow down.

They needed to rescue the woman while Sebas was distracting the others. Even if Sebas was stronger than Gazef Stronoff and Brain Unglaus combined, the opponents were the Six Arms, foes who could stand toe to toe with adamantium ranked adventurers. If they decided to simply swarm Sebas, things could get dicey. That’s why they needed to rescue the woman quickly and escape with Sebas.

After turning several corners and descending a floor, the rogue who was in front stopped.

“Sorry to stop so suddenly, leader. We’re here. Just around the corner is the jail and there’s a woman being held in there.”

It was probably a coincidence, but the moment the rogue spoke, the spell granting them invisibility passed its time limit and the outlines of the three became clearer again. On the rogue’s signal, Climb peeked around the corner and saw a dark hallway with large barred rooms side by side.

“...Nothing else here, just like my reconnaissance earlier.”

There were no other prisoners or guards. It was too suspicious to be explained with just “carelessness”. It was almost like bait. But come to think about it, who would dare infiltrate the building while the strongest of the Eight Fingers, the Six Arms, were gathered there. Without other factors such as Sebas distracting everyone, Climb would not have come here. The Six Arms might have thought so as well. Those were the factors working out for Climb’s group, but they had to be on guard.

“Let’s get this over quick.”

Feeling some sort of camaraderie after being through danger together, Brain asked the rogue with familiarity.

“Can I ask something? What’s that double door over there for?”

When he turned his gaze to innermost part, there was a large door just like Brain said.

“Ah— From my experience, this is more like a holding pen rather than a jail. Behind that door... would be some sort of fighting pit.”

“Speaking of which, I can smell the odour of animals coming from those rooms. I heard that in the Empire, they make monsters fight against each other in a fighting pit...”

Climb smelled the air following Brain’s example. He smelled beasts, carnivores, to be more precise.

Brain murmured to himself.

“But are they using it for training purposes, or for public executions? If there are other uses, I’d rather not think about it. Maybe it was for a show as well. Ah, I talked about something useless. Shall we go?”

Climb nodded at Brain’s suggestion and the rogue agreed as well. With the rogue at the front, Climb and Brain followed. After arriving at one of the inner jail cells, the rogue checked the door. Climb took out one of the bells from the pouch, rang it, and with the power of magic, the noise of something unlocking could be heard. The rogue looked disappointed, but since they didn’t have much time Climb hoped he would understand.

“Are you Tsuare-san?”

Climb asked the woman inside. The woman who was lying on the floor stood up. She wore the clothes of a maid, and her appearance matched Sebas’ description. Considering she hadn’t had the time to change since her kidnapping, this was definitely her. Climb felt a bit of relief. Their first objective was complete. Now was the time for the next objective; to escape with her.

“We were told to rescue you by Sebas-sama. Please come here.”

Tsuare nodded at Climb. Tsuare made an astonished expression when she saw Brain and the rogue after coming out of the jail cell. Her gaze stayed especially long on Brain.

“This door — the one in the same direction as the fighting pit — doesn’t have any noise coming from behind it, but going through a place where we’ve never been before is too dangerous. It’s best to go back the way we came.”

Climb and Brain agreed. Considering they were both warriors, they thought it best to leave such a decision to the expert. Climb looked down at Tsuare’s feet and confirmed that she was wearing shoes. Running wouldn’t be a problem.

“Then let’s go before the enemy comes around.”

“Understood. I’ll take the lead again, but since we don’t have invisibility magic this time, I’ll be more careful. Don’t miss my signals.”

“I understa... what is it, Brain?”

“Hmm? ...Nothing. It’s probably nothing, Climb.”

Brain frowned but said nothing more. He kept staring at Tsuare, but Climb could find nothing wrong with her. She only appeared like a regular maid who had been kidnapped.

“Ready? Then we’ll head out.”

The rogue went ahead, followed by Climb, then Brain and Tsuare, who went last. Racing past the cell doors, the rogue slowed down near the corner in order to scout the way ahead, but someone appeared from around the corner as if they were leisurely taking a stroll and blocked the rogue’s path. They had anticipated some sort of opposition, but it was hard to react to something as sudden as this. Climb froze at the sudden turn of events, but the rogue showed a reaction worthy of a former orichalcum ranked adventurer. He drew his dagger and ran forward with killing intent.

Crash!

With a loud noise, the rogue flew back. It was as if he had been rammed by a bull. It was a coincidence, but Climb caught his fall. If the rogue had fallen on the floor without any way to soften the landing, he would have taken massive damage, but luckily Climb and the Rogue hit the floor together when they were thrown back. His mind immediately went to the rogue who was groaning in pain, but he had to pay his attention to the man who suddenly appeared. That man was bound to be the enemy. Climb suddenly realized the man’s name in a flash and shouted in astonishment.

“Zero!”

This man was part of Six Arms, the leader of the Security branch and the most powerful man in the Eight Fingers.

“...That’s right, kiddo. You’re that whore’s slave. Hmph, for ants to crawl all the way in here. If you leave honey as the bait, they seem to crawl out from everywhere. Truly disgusting.”

Zero only glanced at Climb and the rogue who was sprawled on the floor, but his real focus was on Brain. He was studying him by scanning up and down to gauge how strong of a warrior Brain really was. Climb thanked the fact that the truly powerful man paid no attention to him and checked the rogue’s condition.

“Are you alright? Do you have any healing method?”

Climb spoke quietly so Zero would not notice, but there was no reply, only a pain filled groan. Surprisingly, there was a fist shaped dent in the armor around the chest. It showcased how strong Zero’s strike truly was. The rogue regained conscious after several shakes and Climb patted around his waist at the rogue’s request.

“I remember your face. Brain Unglaus, someone who fought toe to toe with Gazef Stronoff. There’s no weakness in your stance. Seems like you went through some training after the tournament? I can understand now. The reason why Succulent lost was probably because he fought you straight on. His opponent was too strong. I think I’ll need to forgive his loss. Originally, I would kill anyone who makes me lose face, but I am generous. I’ll make an exception for someone of your skill and swordsmanship. Kneel to me and swear to be my subordinate. If you do that, I will help you achieve whatever you want.”

“Is the pay alright?”

“Oh-ho... Interested...?”
“Well, there’s no harm in thinking about it. Since I won against Succulent, I expect some good treatment.”

“Hahaha! You are greedy. To talk about money before begging for your life. You can’t take money with you to your grave.”

“So, what are you saying? You can’t pay me a good amount? Seems you’re poorer than you look. Or are you pocketing everything yourself?”

“What?”

Cracking sounds came from Zero’s fist.

“Seems like your mouth is the only thing that’s working right, Unglaus. There are lots of swordsman who’re better at talking than fighting, are you one of them? Or did you get overconfident after defeating Succulent? Then I should apologize about the fact that you are feeling so satisfied after defeating the weakest of the Six Arms.”

Brain shrugged his shoulder as if to show off. He was probably stalling for time for Climb and the injured rogue. So why was Zero playing along with this? Was it due to his confidence that he could win even against all three of them? Or was there something else?

… *Huh?*

When Climb paid attention to his surroundings, he saw Tsuare slowly creeping towards Brain. If she wanted to be protected, it would have been better to move behind Climb and the rogue. There was no reason to brave danger to stand behind someone who was facing off against Zero. Brain looked behind him once. It was a subtle movement, but his gaze went towards Tsuare and it was not a friendly look either. No, it was more like he was facing an enemy.

Huh? Why there? Did he look this way? No, that wasn’t it.

Something was happening. Climb stood up with an uneasy feeling.

“Hmph, it seems like the ant finally stood up. Stalled for enough time? Then let’s hear what you truly think. No, there is no need for words. Kneel or don’t, there is only one choice. Now Unglaus, make your decision.”

Brain snorted at Zero.

That was all.

“Then die!”

He put his left hand forward and pulled back his right hand to make a fist. He lowered his centre of gravity and stood steady. The way his muscles expanded, one would almost expect to hear the sound of ripping flesh. If one had to describe Zero right now with a simple description, he would be like a boulder, no, a mad bull. Brain also lowered his stance. It was similar to Zero, but also completely different. If Zero was like a rapid stream, then Brain was similar to calm and clear flowing water. If Zero was offense, Brain was defense.

“I told them not to kill the old man, but they are very lively. They might overdo it and kill him. That would put me in a difficult spot, because I’m supposed to kill that old man as an example for what happens to people who dare oppose us.”

Zero’s face crinkled with anger. It was as if his face was proof that rage could turn a person ugly.

“Unglaus, your death will be proof that I am the strongest. Your grave will serve as a reminder for anyone foolish enough to challenge the Six Arms! As for that whore’s slave, I’ll decorate his head and send it to her.”

Enough killing intent flooded the hallway to make Climb’s body shake. However, compared to what he felt from Sebas yesterday, it was nothing. Climb turned sharply and Zero showed the tiniest bit of concern at that.

“Is that it? Alright. Zero, I’ll take you on. Climb, take care of the one behind me!”

The only person who didn’t understand was Climb. The rogue threw a dart at Tsuare without hesitation, and the dart thrown by the former orichalcum ranked adventurer was sharp and fast.

Yet Tsuare was somehow able to dodge the dart almost effortlessly. From Sebas’ description, Tsuare was just a simple maid. Her movement just now was too agile for this to be a coincidence.

“Was I already seen through?”

The appearance was that of Tsuare, but the voice was that of “Devil of Illusions” Succulent.

“The reason why you didn’t say anything to someone who came to rescue you was because your voice would give it away, right? But if you try to stand behind someone, anybody would be suspicious. Even before that I was a bit hesitant, considering the possibility that she was either being mind-controlled or that someone was disguising as her.”

With that, Brain revealed Succulent’s trick while focusing on Zero.

“I also noticed something about the way you were running, but I couldn’t get any solid proof even until the very end... I have to admit you’re quite good. No wonder, even though I was injured, you were able to avoid my dart without saying anything.”

The rogue stopped talking and gave Succulent a grateful expression.

Zero tsked.

“Hmph... Succulent, it seems your little tricks were seen through. In that case the time for tricks is over. Now is the time where everything will be decided by strength! ... Succulent, take care of those two. You can do that much, right?”
“O, of course, boss.”

Tsuare’s figure melted away and Succulent appeared. He was still wearing a maid’s clothing. Succulent understood what Zero meant very well and stared at Climb.

“We meet again, kiddo.”

His voice was strangely tense, considering the fact that he had won against Climb yesterday. Eight Fingers was not a forgiving organization, and no further failures would be tolerated. Succulent’s back was against the wall and he could not afford to give any quarter.

“Was Eight Fingers capable of releasing someone imprisoned directly under the orders of the Royal Princess??”

Climb felt the extent of the Eight Fingers’ influence as he gripped his sword.

“...I can’t lose this time.”

Yesterday, Brain defeated him with a single strike but since both Zero and Succulent were present, it would be difficult for Brain to face against two of the Six Arms at once. Climb also couldn’t rely on Brain winning against Zero and focus only on stalling for time. He knew Succulent was better than he was. With some half-assed resolve, he would just lose again like yesterday.

This time he will win.

Climb resolved himself to not back away and stepped towards Succulent.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry~. I’ll help you out.”

The rogue spoke from behind him. The light tone was probably intended to prevent Climb from tensing up too much. He was thankful for the support, but the rogue had received a strike from Zero and still hadn’t fully recovered even after using a potion. He was also not sure how well the rogue would be able to support someone he had never fought side by side with before.

The rogue smiled as if he read what Climb was thinking.

“Don’t worry, I usually fill the support role. I’ll show you a way of fighting other than clashing with blades.”

“Thank you.”

The rogue had vast experience. Climb didn’t need to accommodate him, instead the rogue would support where Climb was lacking. Climb only needed to fight Succulent with all his strength. When he steeled his determination and turned around, Succulent was making clones like last time. There were several Succulents, and Climb couldn’t tell which was the real one. A bitter taste spread through his mouth. The moment the two of them slowly edged towards each other, an opened pouch flew from behind Climb towards Succulent.

“This is how rogues fight!”

The pouch exploded beneath Succulent’s feet and powder spread everywhere. Succulent covered his mouth to guard against poison, but this wasn’t poison, it was a magic item.

“It’s the ‘Powder of Will O’ Wisp’.”

The effect was immediate. Out of the five Succulents, only one had some milky, white light about him.

Succulent realized this and his eyes opened wide.

The ‘Powder of Will O’ Wisp’ was intended to be used against stealthy opponents like rogues or someone using invisibility magic. It only reacted to living beings.

Since ‘Multiple Vision’ copied the main body, even if one threw ink on it, it would be reflected immediately amongst the clones. Unless someone was really good at distinguishing, it was very hard to discern the true body. However, the effects from magic items were not reflected in the clones. If it was a high class spell, it would be able to deceive even magic items, but someone like Succulent, who trained to be an Illusionist and Fencer at the same time, couldn’t cast that kind of magic.

Climb’s sword came swinging towards Succulent’s true body.

“Damn it.”

Succulent leaped away, avoiding the attack. It was a splendid dodge, however the maid’s clothing became messy as the result.

They exchanged ten more blows just like that.

The one on the offensive was Climb. This wasn’t an intentional trick of Succulent, but the pure difference in their abilities. There was no way a person could suddenly become extremely strong over the course of a day, so nothing should have changed from yesterday. However, there were always exceptions. Climb had simply gotten stronger and

Succulent became weaker.

First of all, unlike yesterday, Climb had his armour, shield, sword and other accessories with him this time. His stamina and defense had increased and he could use his usual fighting style. On the other hand, all of Succulent’s magical items had been taken away when he was arrested, and he was also wearing the cumbersome attire of a maid right now.

Because of their changed equipment, the difference between them became smaller, but that was not all.

One reason was that Climb already knew how Succulent fought. Another was that there was a rogue supporting him. Thanks to the items the rogue was using, Succulent’s illusion magic was useless. It was as if they were ready to face Succulent.

The rogue had actually collected information on the Six Arms and had prepared to face every single one. The fact he was prepared for even the imprisoned Succulent was amazing. Only someone with a truly meticulous personality could prepare for all that.

“Damn it!”

Even before the fight was fully underway, Succulent let out a frustrated scream.

The one in his sight was the rogue, but Climb always moved to block Succulent’s path towards his target. He could not allow Succulent to attack him, and being shielded by Climb, the rogue started to taunt

Succulent.

“Oi, oi. Don’t make such a scary face. You’re supposed to be a member of Six Arms, someone who can stand toe to toe with adamantium ranked adventurers. This kind of handicap should be easy for you.”

Succulent’s face crinkled with rage. The scratches from earlier exchanges bled, making his face even uglier.

“Bastard!”

With a loud curse, Succulent posed to cast his magic. Normally, a warrior like Climb would charge to disrupt the casting, but this time he didn’t. While trading more than ten blows with Succulent, he had started to trust the rogue to do the right thing at the right moment.

A bottle flew from behind Climb and shattered at Succulent’s feet. He could see coloured smoke spreading everywhere.

“Guh! Cough, cough ”

Succulent coughed in pain.

The rogue had interrupted the casting with an alchemical item, which effects became immediately apparent.

If he had specialized as a magic caster, this kind of disruption would have been nothing, but because he had trained to be a warrior alongside magic caster, even a minor disruption broke his concentration, causing him to waste his mana.

Climb rushed at the distracted Succulent with all his might. It was not the continuation of the fight so far. It was the kind of advance that was filled with the determination to not take a single step back. Depending on the observer, some would say it was a premature move in a bid for a fast victory. But Climb's warrior instincts screamed.

This moment would determine the end of the duel.

It was true that Climb and the rogue had been on the offensive so far, but there was no guarantee that they could keep their advantage. The items the rogue was throwing were bound to run out eventually, so he had to finish this while they still held the upper hand.

What Climb activated was an original martial art he learned yesterday.

This skill didn't have a name yet, but if he were to give it a name right now, he would call 'Limit Breaker: Mind'. The effect was to remove all limits imposed on the body by the brain, and as a result all his abilities would increase by a level, including his physical ones.

The downside was that if he used it for an extended period of time, it would cause physical fatigue and muscle tearing, but if he didn't try to finish the fight quickly, even if he had to use this kind of method, he would not be able to win against Succulent.

As the martial art activated, he could feel something in his mind click and change.

He screamed out all the emotions that were swirling inside of him, and panic spread on Succulent’s face as if he had realised something Perhaps he felt fear and astonishment, but in any case, this wasn’t a face that someone who could stand toe to toe with an adamantium ranked adventurer would show to someone below his level.

Climb swung his sword down but it was blocked. To block a longsword with just a dagger without any help from magic was truly praiseworthy. However to force a skilled fencer like Succulent who specialized in dodging to block, Climb’s strike was also commendable.

Despite that, the attack didn’t end here. Climb followed through with a kick.

As Succulent tried to protect his stomach, his face crinkled.

“Arrrrggghhhh—!”

Succulent’s face paled and he staggered back while pulling back his waist.

The rogue stepped out of Climb’s shadow.

He had kicked Succulent between the legs with an iron boot, and even though Climb wore a protective pad, he could still feel an imaginary pain traveling down to his feet.

After that, Climb dealt him a final blow!

Blood spattered and Succulent collapsed on the floor. He did not let his guard down and stood wary. He especially paid attention so nothing could approach the rogue and confirmed that it was not an illusion.

This was a huge victory. Even if it was two against one, this victory meant a lot. Climb looked towards Brain. He wondered if he could help, but quickly abandoned the thought.

That fight was on a different level altogether.

The sound was different as well. Even though it was a katana clashing with a fist, metallic sounds rang out. Their fight showed no signs of ending. The katana and fists were clashing against each other without time for breath.

The one who especially attracted attention was Zero. His strikes were carving the wall and left marks as if it was made out of soft clay.

“Damn... They said high-level monks have fists of steel, but that bastard’s well beyond that. He’s at least mithril, no orichalcum.”

The rogue who stood beside him murmured. During a solid minute of trading blows, in a fight where Climb would’ve been killed immediately, neither took a single scratch. Zero showed signs of earnest respect on his face.

“Unglaus... You’re better than I thought. You’re the first one who blocked my attacks like this.”

Brain had equal signs of respect on his face.

“You, too... This is my second time seeing a monk of this calibre.”

“Oh-ho?”

Zero made a curious face.

“To think there was another monk on the same level as me. Never heard of him. What’s his name? Since I can’t hear it when you’re dead.”

“He’s probably coming here as we speak. After defeating your Six Arms.”

Zero frowned before smiling.

“Heh, you mean that old man? Unfortunately, my four trusty subordinates will be welcoming him. They might not be as strong as me, but they’re much stronger than Succulent. There’s no way he can come here.”

“Is that so? I can see him coming around the corner any minute now.”

“Oooh, I’m so scared. I guess in that case I should fight more seriously.”

Climbs eyes opened wide on that word. If Zero was holding back during an exchange with these kinds of blows, what would his true strength be like? He was also amazed that Brain showed no signs of surprise.

Both of them weren’t fighting with their full strength? This really is a battle between men who could rival humanity’s finest, the adamantium ranked adventurers!

“That would be best, Zero. Those two over there are done, so I don’t need to drag this out. You’re going to lose here, Zero.”

Brain sheathed his Katana and slowly lowered his stance. It was the same stance as yesterday, where he took down Succulent with a single strike. Before Climb could even wonder if Brain could take down Zero with a single strike, Zero jumped back. He had easily jumped a distance that was well beyond the limit of ordinary human strength.

“Edstrom can make a barrier with her swords, but you seem to have a different kind of a barrier. If I stepped in carelessly, I would be cut in half.”

He couldn’t completely figure out Brain’s original martial arts, but to be able to guess what kind of skill it was showed that Zero’s ability as a warrior was truly superior.

“But... It’s a skill you can’t use without taking a stance first.”

Zero thrust his fist in midair. It might have seemed like a meaningless move, but Brain’s body shook from shockwave made by the fist.

“I can win by just attacking you from a distance like this. Or do you have a way to cut someone who is far away?”

“No, I don’t.”

Brain answered honestly.

“If you fight like that, then all I need to do is not take that stance.”

Zero asked Brain quietly in an atmosphere almost not befitting him, in deep and calm state.

“Brain Unglaus, is that your trump card?”

“Of course. It’s my trump card that has only been defeated... once.”

“How boring. If it’s already been defeated, then this will be the second time.”

Zero slowly pulled his fist back and took a stance.

“I will break you head on. I’ll destroy that little skill of yours and win. First I’ll win against you, Brain Unglaus and one day I’ll make Gazef Stronoff kneel before me. Then I will be the Kingdom’s strongest.”

“If you think you can try using me as the first stepping stone for your ambition, you’re going to slip. You really must have nothing to do, Zero.”

“Talking really is the only thing you’re good at... No, since you got this far, that’s not strictly true. However, realize the fact that I am better than you in your grave. That it was foolish to challenge Zero-sama! Here I come!”

Zero’s upper body had tattoos of various animals, which were emitting a faint light. Comparatively, Brain did not move. He simply waited like a statue. Climb could feel he was about to feel massive amount of released power from both people.

A place where nobody could interrupt and raw power collided with raw power.

And suddenly a voice that was out of place could be heard:

“So this is the place where everybody gathered.”

Everyone was surprised and turned around to look at the intruder. Even Zero and Brain, who could not afford to take their eyes off each other, did so. An old man was standing there, it was Sebas. Someone Zero would’ve never expected to be here had appeared.

“What? What happened? The Six Arms should be taking care of you... Did you sneak past them?”

Sebas shook his head.

“No. All your comrades has been defeated.”

“...Don’t speak nonsense. They might be weaker than me, but they’re still the Six Arms. There’s no way you can come here unscathed after facing them.”

“Surprise often accompanies the truth.”

“Sebas-sama! The Tsuare here was a fake! It was Succulent disguising himself with an illusion. We need to rescue her now!”

“Ah, thank you for worrying about her, Climb, but there is no need to be concerned. I already rescued her. She was in a different part of the building.”

Sebas looked over his shoulder and Climb followed his gaze to find a woman covered in a blanket near the entrance.

“Ah!”

Climb quickly looked down at Succulent. His maid clothing was ripped in places and soaked in blood. There was no way to hand that over, nor would the receiving party want it.

“There’s no need to worry about it, Climb. It’s just regular maid dress, so it’s disposable.”

Climb felt relief and Sebas who was smiling bitterly.

“Oi, oi, oi. To just chatter on while ignoring me... You sure are gutsy.”

Zero, who couldn’t move carelessly due to Brain in front of him barely moved from his spot to look at Sebas with a hate filled expression.

“Old man, I’ll ask again. What happened to my subordinates?”

“—I killed them all.”

It was a casual tone, as if one was picking a flower, but it was also filled with coldness.

“N, no way! You think I’ll believe you?”

Sebas smiled at Zero’s scream. Sebas’ laugh without a single hint of hostility felt only truthful.

“...Brain Unglaus. We’ll postpone our match a little bit. I need to show this old man the power of Six Arms.”

“Alright. Just try not to get destroyed so fast. Well, not that I’ll have my turn anyways.”

“Shut up! ...Old man, you’ll pay for your lies with your life.”

Sebas smiled bitterly, but the man who proclaimed himself as the strongest couldn’t stand that smile Zero’s tattoos gave off a faint glow.

The head of the Security branch and leader of the Six Arms, “Battle Demon” Zero.

If men like Gazef Stronoff and Brain Unglaus fought with him unarmed, they would die in an instant. Even if they were armed, the outcome of the match would be unclear.

One of the classes he had attained was “Shamanic Adept”. This class borrowed the strength of animal spirits and enhanced one’s physical abilities. There was a limit to how often one could use this skill a day, but it raised the user’s abilities to that of a beast. For a physically superior animal to use a human being’s martial arts, it was a truly fearsome combination.

Zero activated his skills. Usually he only activated one to conserve his strength, but he realized that Sebas was quite a strong opponent.

Though he didn’t really believe that Sebas defeated four of the Six Arms by himself, considering that he had broken through the front, there was bound to be someone else with him. Most likely Blue Rose. Until he could gather more detailed information, all he could do was destroy Sebas with all his strength and postpone his duel with Brain Unglaus.

He would need to show overwhelming strength to the onlookers before taking off. He determined this would be the best course of action and prepared his strongest skill accordingly.

Panther on the legs, falcon on the back, rhino on the arms, buffalo on the chest, lion on the head; he activated them all. He felt explosive power surging through him. He was almost worried about his body swelling up and exploding.

“Gyyyyaaaaaahhhhh!!!”

Shouting out the power building in him, he took a step forward.

The attack of strongest of the Six Arms, Zero. It was a straightforward punch. No feints, no tricks, just a pure, straight punch. But the strength behind it was immense. Not only his skills as a Shamanic Adept, but also his other skills as Monk, as well as his magic items enhanced the strength and destructiveness of his fist.

It was so fast that even Zero had a hard time controlling it. The fact it was a straightforward punch with all his strength made it a usable skill. He had no hesitation in showing his ultimate strike. This skill was simple, but invincible.

He had confidence that no trickery could stop it. Zero felt a sensation of superiority above others as he rapidly stepped forward with a sensation of being pulled back.

“Watc—”

Somebody shouted.

But it was too late.

In a blink of an eye, the fist carrying extreme power and weight had already arrived in front of Sebas and still kept propelling itself forward. Zero could only laugh at Sebas who was still standing there stiffly. He would regret fighting the strongest of the Six Arms.

“—Hrmph.”

The fist found its mark on Sebas’ undefended stomach. It was a perfect strike.

With an explosive aftershock, Sebas body flew back like a ragdoll. He hit the floor, but the strike was powerful enough to make his body keep bouncing back on the floor. It was an immediate death. No, it would only be natural for it to be so.

All of his internal organs would have turned into a liquid by now. The outside was the only thing that kept its semblance of a human. This was Zero’s strongest skill. A demonic skill that was true embodiment of phrase, “single strike kill”.

Or at least that’s what was supposed to happen.

Sebas stood his ground and did not budge even a bit. He had taken Zero’s fist, with all the strength in it, with just the muscles in his abdomen. It was an unbelievable sight to anyone; a scene defying all common sense.

The difference of strength between their appearances was absolute, but the result was the complete opposite.

The one who could not believe this the most was Zero. There was no creature that could receive his ultimate attack and survive. This had been the case so far. However, with a result like this, he did not even realise that something black had passed right in front of his eyes.

Sebas’ leg rose high into the sky. It passed by Zero’s nose with fluid motion. Then the leg came crashing down.

A heel drop kick.

That was the name of the skill, but the speed and strength behind the kick was abnormal.

“...Who are you.”

Zero murmured and Sebas’ lips curled at the edge.

Terrifying crunching and cracking sounds spread everywhere. Zero’s head was smashed, his neck and spine broke as if he had been crushed by an object weighing several hundreds of kilograms, and Zero’s body kneeled.

The hallway was wrapped in silence.

The atmosphere could only be described as “stupor”. Sebas moved his feet as if avoiding blood from Zero’s smashed head and dusted the place where Zero’s fist had struck.

“Phew, that was dangerous. I would have died if not for your warning.”
He was lying! What warning?
The three men, and perhaps Tsuare as well, did not speak out loud, but all shouted that in their minds.

“I survived, thanks to you, Climb-kun.”

“—ouh... Ah, yes...”

Climb who could only mouth the last words of “watch out” received Sebas’ thanks rigidly. He did not know what to say due to the mental shock.

“It seems I was just a tiny bit stronger.”

Sebas showed a tiny bit of space between two fingers. He probably meant the distance between the fingers was the difference between him and Zero, but there was no one who would agree.

Tiny bit my ass.

Just like before, everyone thought this on the inside.

“Either way, since we rescued her, it would be best to retreat.”

“Uh, no, about the Six Arms... did you really?”

“Yes, I killed them all. They were too many and strong opponents. I regret I was not able to give them any quarter.”

“Is, is that so. It was inevitable, please don’t dwell too much on it.”

All three of their gaze immediately shifted to Zero’s corpse. They could not even suggest that it was a lie.

“T-then we should call in the soldiers to search rest of the building.”

The soldiers were originally there to search the building. The fact they could clean out a stronghold with Sebas was an incredible stroke of luck. If Sebas’ statement was true, and it probably was the truth, there would also be the additional bonus of having destroyed Eight Fingers’ most powerful fighting force.

The only real minus was not being able to capture Zero, but they had calculated they would not be able to arrest him in the first place, so there was no real loss. Anyone who argued about the result would be a fool.

Climb spoke with an excited voice and Brain nodded as if it was the correct decision, but there was someone who stood with rigid expression.

“What is it, Sebas-sama?”

“N-no. It’s nothing. There’s just something that doesn’t sit well with me... But before that, it seems the air in here is not a good one. Would you mind stepping outside with me?”

“Yes, of course.”

Looking at Zero’s corpse and Tsuare, everybody agreed with Sebas. Sebas approached Tsuare who was near a jail cell door and held her in a princess carry. Her white feet, which didn’t have a lot of meat between their bones and their skin, kicked at the air for a bit and they could see Tsuare’s thin arms grabbing Sebas.

They could feel that the relationship between the two of them wasn’t just that of a butler and a maid.

You should stop prying into their personal life. It’s not befitting you Climb. It doesn’t matter what their relationship is.

“Then let’s go.”

Climb spoke and headed out first.

The other three followed. They could start the investigation after Sebas had left and there wasn’t much chance that someone would jump out and attack Sebas, who had both his hands full. He was tense for a moment, but there was no need to.

The building, which had been bustling with activity when they first infiltrated, showed no sign of anyone being there. Logically speaking, there wouldn’t be anyone brave enough to challenge Sebas when he had just taken down Six Arms. Chances were that most of them had fled, and if that had been the case he hoped the group outside would capture anyone who tried to run.

Climb’s shoulder felt lighter with a sensation of relief.

However, someone tapped Climb’s shoulder. It was the rogue. He was looking at completely different direction and his expression was similar to the one he had made when Sebas defeated Zero with a single strike. Following his gaze, Climb’s eyes also widened when he saw it.

“A wall of flame?”

Climb nodded at Brain’s whisper. If a house was burning, then flames would be a natural occurrence, but if it was a regular flame, Climb wouldn’t have been so surprised. However, a gigantic wall of flame over 30 meters tall had sprouted and was surrounding part of the capital. Lengthwise, it would be well over several kilometers long.

“What do you think that might be?”

Three people snapped out of it when they heard Sebas’ curious, but relaxed voice.

“What should we do, leader? That looks like the warehouse district. Which group was in charge of that location?”

“The leader of Blue Rose, Alvein-sama... We’ll consider this an emergency, cancel all plans and retreat to the royal castle. We’ll follow the orders from high-up afterwards.”

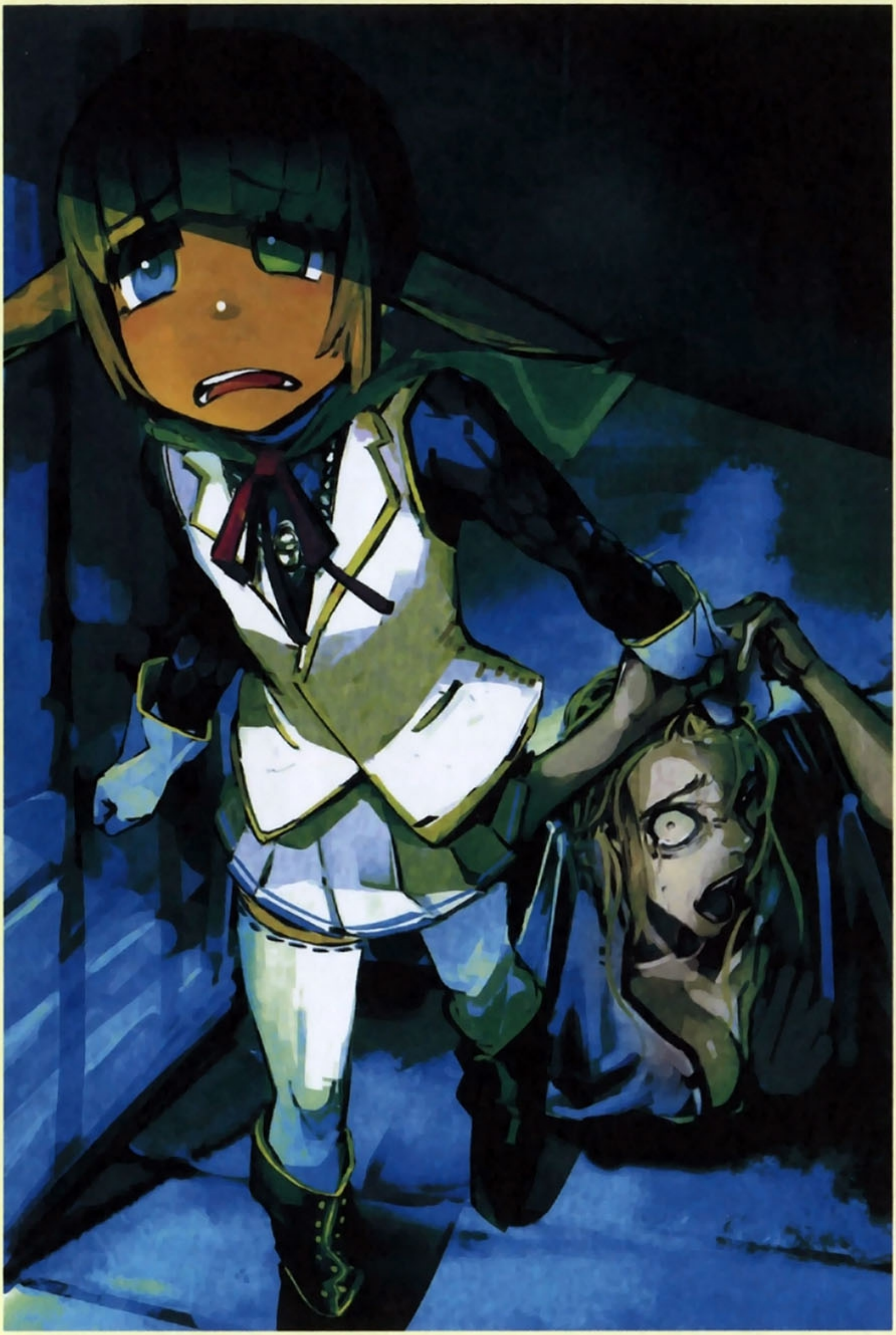
“That seems like the best course of action... Ah, for Sebas-sama...”

“I’ll be taking Tsuare to a safe place, so that nothing like this can ever happen again.”

“I understand, Sebas-sama. Thank you for yesterday and today.”

“There is no need to worry about it. Our goals just happened to have coincided... I shall repay the debt for helping me rescue Tsuare one day. Now then, please excuse me.”

Chapter 9 - Jaldabaoth



9章　ヤルダバオト

Part 1

Lower Fire Month (9th Month), 4th Day, 21:10

Because of her thirst, the woman woke up and opened her eyes.

She slowly moved on an especially large bed and reached out for the water jug placed next to the bed, but failed to touch anything.

Then she recalled that no water jug had been placed next to the bed earlier today, and involuntarily clicked her tongue.

“Oooh”

She yawned. Like an elderly person, she was accustomed to sleeping and waking up early, therefore having been asleep for just one hour was certainly not enough rest.

Swallowing, she placed her hand on her throat, and only got down from the bed when she felt the saliva going down her throat. Taking a thick bath towel placed on one side of the bedcover, she wrapped it around her naked body, put on a pair of slippers and walked outside.

This mansion was the main base within the Capital and was the property of Hilma, head of the drug traders. Logically speaking, the ten or so people positioned within this mansion ought to be quite busy, but it was eerily silent, as if nobody was around.

Hilma was surprised as she walked along the corridor. If all the nobles had left, then sooner or later this mansion would be quiet. Even still, wasn’t it a little too quiet?

In this mansion, calling out to the nobles would definitely elicit a response.

Speaking of nobles, even if they were the eldest son and wanted to succeed the family, this would usually happen rather late in their lives, when they were roughly thirty years old.

Prior to this, they were given allowance to spend as they wished, by their fathers who were the head of their families. Because they were already married adults with children, they were invited to this mansion for their entertainment.

Wine, women, drugs. Flattering compliments were spoken into their ears. Conversing with other nobles in the same situation resulted in them building closer relationships with each other. In doing this, they enjoyed themselves and established connections at the same time.

Once that noble took over the family, it was time for the harvest. If the noble tried to stand up against them, they would be given the stick. On the other hand, if the noble was willing to support them, they would be given the carrot. Like this, the circles of nobility were slowly being infiltrated.

She walked along the silent corridor to find some water to drink.

In fact, she didn’t despise silence, she even preferred it over noisiness. Her entertaining personality when nobles were noisily forming friendships was only a facade. However, the atmosphere right now was simply too unnatural. This silence cast a chilling sensation, causing her to feel as if she was the only person in the mansion.

“...What happened?”

The guards could not have left this place without saying a single word. If there really was an abnormal situation that happened, shouting would immediately give away her own position, which would be a really bad turn of events. Hypothetically, if she were to return to her room and hide under the covers, what then? Doing that would be too passive.

It was necessary to take action when the situation called for it, otherwise one would be devoured like prey. This was her belief and she had been able to climb all the way from being a high-class prostitute to her current position because she strongly adhered to this way of thinking.

Looking around the corridor she could see that apparently nobody was present, and she quickly ran to get out of this place.

She trusted her own sixth sense, and the place she ran towards was a hidden room which only she knew about. That room contained many magic items, precious gems and escape passages. Although this place was the headquarters within the capital, there were still many other bases distributed all around the city. It looked like it was about time to flee to one of them.

Proceeding forward while trying her best to be silent, she suddenly noticed something was wrong.

“What, what is this?”

She involuntarily gave off a soft groan when she saw a strange phenomenon outside of the window.

The thin glass was covered in ivy, completely blocking the sunlight from outside. No matter how hard she tried, it was impossible to open the window even for a small crack.

She frantically looked at the other windows along the corridor. All of them were covered with thick ivy.

“W-what the? J-just who…”

Before she slept, the scene had definitely been different. In the short span of only an hour, it had become like this. It had to be the result of somebody’s magic.

But, who exactly? What was his objective?

She had absolutely no clue, but knew that the situation was incredibly dangerous right now.

“Dammit!”

Swearing as she trotted along, she did not even care if her bath robe had come undone. No matter what, it was imperative to get inside the small secret room.

Arriving at the stairs, she looked downwards. It was deathly silent.

She gingerly walked down the stairs, making use of the rays of light that seeped in from the tiny gaps amongst the ivy. Thanks to the thick carpets laid on the stair, she was able to descend without a single noise. She was immensely grateful for this.

“——!”

It was only when she arrived at the floor below that she was stunned with surprise.

There was a figure standing in the corridor, staring at her. The figure itself seemed to melt into the darkness, but it wasn’t like the way thieves hid themselves in the shadows. It was because the figure’s skin itself had a dark complexion, being a dark elf with heterochromatic eyes that shone in the darkness.

The dark elf stepped out of the dark. She wore a young girl’s clothing. In her hand she held a dark staff, and her eyes were looking directly at Hilma.

Behind this mysterious young girl was the hidden room.

She recalled the layout of the mansion as she made her decision, and edged closer whilst trembling in fear.

Some nobles must have brought it in as a play-thing, in that case whatever happens to it does not matter.

However she immediately discarded this wishful thought.

It appeared that Cocco Doll had already been captured. In order to avoid any unfavourable consequences from future power struggles, she had long since prepared escape routes to safe houses. As such, the subordinates in this mansion would never bring in irrelevant people without making some form of report.

“Hey, ojou-chan.”

When a sound was uttered, Hilma frowned in surprise.

As a high-class prostitute, she had come across all types of people. Experience told her that the one she saw before her was not a young girl, but a boy.

The clothes were luxurious, the type which most people could not get their hands on. They were high-class goods that even Hilma could not obtain.

The dark elves had always been living in the forests, but now one with an unknown gender had appeared inside the Kingdom, wearing unusually luxurious clothing.

Had the surrounding atmosphere not been so abnormal, she would have assumed she was looking at a slave of a noble, one meant for their peculiar desires.

“...You, what are you doing here?”

The other person was completely unguarded, and slowly got closer to her.

“O-oba-san, are you the most important person in this mansion?”

Even if she was called an oba-san, she was not unhappy in the slightest. For such a young elf, her age must certainly be at the point to be appropriately called oba-san.

“No—”

She was about to say this, but suddenly, she got an extremely bad feeling.

She had tremendous trust in her own intuition. Compared to her common sense, she trusted her intuition even more and had therefore been able to survive up to this point. Common sense could betray her, but her intuition would never do so.

“Yes. Yes that is so. I am the most important person in this mansion.”

“I-is that so. That’s great.”

The boy smiled. Hilma heart ignited with a fiery desire, as if she had the urge to defile a beautiful object. It was that kind of pure smile.

“U-uhh, that’s not what I heard from the people here.”

As if in response to the boy’s words, the nearby window opened. There stood a young girl in a maid costume, her body wafting with the smell of blood instead of perfume.

Hilma covered her mouth with her hands, holding back a cry of despair.

The maid held a man's arm in her lovely hand. The arm’s shoulder muscles were visible as if it had been ripped from the shoulder.

“W-What!”

“E~eh, that, it seems like someone wants to attack this mansion. We need to finish everything before they get here. So I brought her with me.”

“Please don’t mind me. It has been a while since I have been this full, and I am really satisfied right now.”

The mouth did not move, but still emitted a noise. It was an extremely surprising matter, but Hilma still had other things she wanted to ask. Especially about what exactly the maid had been eating, since it caused her body to shake non-stop. Hoping it was different from her expectation, Hilma asked:

“T-then, m-me too? You also want to eat me?”

“Ah? Ah, not so. Oba-san is different.”

It was not reassuring. Her intuition warned that a worse fate awaited her.

“—Then, young man, would you like to come here for a bit of pleasure?”

The cloth covering her slowly slid off, revealing her shoulders.

This was the body she took pride in. As a high-class prostitute, all those that she serviced were upper-class nobles. Therefore she had devoted all her efforts to shed excess fat, maintaining her attractiveness. No matter how honest the person was, they would be unable to take their eyes off her; Even a small child would be aroused. She had tremendous self-confidence in this aspect.

However, no emotions could be seen in the juvenile’s eyes.

That also means to say that my attractiveness is not as great as the maid on the side! Even if I myself had changed business, I’m still a professional. Even if it is an emotionless person, it is still possible to induce raging desire! I can do this!

Moving sinuously like a snake, she showed off her graceful body while advancing slowly, getting closer in an unsuspecting manner.

However, she could not detect the boy’s lust.

That was why it was necessary to use other means. Her hand slowly moved, moving past the boy’s neck — and then activated a magic item — Viper’s Tattoo.

The snake tattoo drawn on both hands suddenly materialised, with the snake raising its sickle-like fangs to bite into the boy’s body. Anyone who was bitten by this powerful neurotoxic snake would immediately spasm before departing this world. For Hilma who lacked combat ability, this was her killer move.

However the boy nimbly grabbed the incredibly fast poisonous snake with one hand and crushed it without hesitation.

The viper tattoo slowly returned to Hilma’s wrist. Because the materialised entity was killed, it would take roughly one day’s time in order to recover. During this period it was impossible to activate it again.

Having taken action yet unable to achieve the result she had envisaged, Hilma was caught in the worst possible situation and couldn’t help but retreat slowly. What terrified her the most was the fact that despite the chain of events that had transpired, the boy’s expression had not changed even once. Even when he was attacked, neither anxiety nor hostility could be seen.

“Ah, ah, then, let’s… get moving.”

“Where to?”

In the moment that Hilda harboured this doubt, a surge of excruciating pain came from her knee. It was so severe that she could not even stand up, and helplessly fell onto the floor.

“Aaaaaahhhhhh!!”

She issued a pained shout; the pain was enough to make her sweat heavily. She unwillingly glanced at her knee and immediately regretted doing so.

Her left foot was twisted in the opposite direction, the bone visibly exposed as it had pierced her flesh.

As Hilma cried, she also thought about using her hand to press down on the painful area, but she hesitated, afraid.

The boy grabbed Hilma’s hair and dragged her outside.

An observer of this scene would not be able to tell that she was being dragged along with a powerful force. His strength was immense, even causing many hairs to be yanked out, yet he paid no attention to this.

“No! No! Please stop!”

The boy glanced at the wailing Hilma, but did not halt his pace for even a second.

“Quickly! We’ll get in trouble if we don’t hurry up!”

Part 2

Lower Fire Month (9th Month) 4th Day, 22:20

After assaulting the mansion, Entoma Vasilissa Zeta walked out through the main door.

She picked up a piece of paper that was lying next to her feet, crumpled it into a ball and threw it towards the mansion.

The original plan was to sweep the mansion clean of humans, then retrieve important books and valuable items before retreating. Like fleeting birds, they were to leave no trace that they had been there, and since time was tight, they would only take what they could. However, in the end the house had been left completely empty, as if it had been cleared out by thieves.

Nonetheless, this was also completely fine because Demiurge, the one who had sent Entoma and Mare here, mentioned that this was a possibility. But then again, the overall time spent here had exceeded their estimations by far.

Together with the other demons, Mare and her should have departed much earlier. Mare had taken the most important person of this mansion and went ahead to the rendezvous point. Because there was still enough time, the lower-class demons brought along a mountain of stolen goods and were preparing for everybody to evacuate.

That should have been the case, but then they discovered an underground storage which was completely packed with stolen goods and illegal drugs during their retreat.

The appropriation work was therefore slowed down.

Firstly, the underground area was divided into many rooms, with valuable items and many cheap goods piled together, making it incredibly difficult to search through. It was basically like finding a specific tree in the middle of a forest. Even if it were Entoma and the demons, they could not possibly relocate all of the items, as such it was necessary to locate the desired tree within the forest.

If the woman taken away by Mare had still been here, this problem would have been dealt with early on, but it was already too late for that.

Entoma and the demons stuffed the goods which they deemed to be trash to one side of the room. Even for demons who had far more strength than humans, this was rather cumbersome work. But thanks to this method and their efforts, they were able to successfully take away all of the items that had value.

As the person responsible, Entoma, who stayed to the end, had the refreshed expression one would have at the completion of an assignment. She looked at the night sky, using her hand to wipe off her sweat. Although she did not secrete a single drop of sweat, that was how she felt.

“Ha. Everybody move the items away then~”

Obeying Entoma’s command, huge insects the size of a man carrying large amounts of cargo on their backs flew into the night sky. These giant beetles were all summoned through her entomomancer ability.

Their wings gave off a heavy and low vibrating sound, and then the insects flew in a straight line formation towards their destination.

After personally sending off the insects transporting the heavy goods, Entoma pondered as she looked at the object she held in one hand.

“Ah, must resist eating. I must, I must.”

With a ‘bop’ sound, she gently knocked herself on the head, and brought the severed hand of a man to the area below her chin. The man’s hand then disappeared with a ‘chomp chomp chomp’ sound as Entoma’s throat continuously moved. Her expression was extremely cute, but the smell of blood had also slowly spread out.

“Women’s fat is soft and the meat tastes delicious. Children’s fat is thin, and the meat tastes great as well. But, ah, the best is of course the textured meat of men.”

She nimbly avoided the bones as she ate, then threw the rest of the hand into the mansion.

“Thank you for the meal!”

She bowed in the direction of the mansion, and, in order not to be late, she began to head off to her destination in accordance with her orders. However she had not taken many steps when a nearby sound made her stop.

“Yo. It is a beautiful night, is it not?”

“...Tonight is a beautiful night indeed, but I gather it isn’t so wonderful for you?”

It was unclear whether the one who slowly revealed herself was a man or a woman. Although it felt like she was a woman, her physique was that of a man.

“You, what are you doing here?”

“Taking a walk.”

“...You, what was it that you ate so eagerly just now??”

“Meat.”

“...Human meat?”

The manwoman’s voice was as cold as ice, yet Entoma was not fazed at all. She didn’t care what kind of emotions humans harboured against her. If they dared to interfere, they would be crushed; If they did not, they would be ignored. If she were hungry, they would be caught for food. For Entoma, this was all their existence amounted to.

Slowly, the manwoman lifted her war pick. After seeing this action, Entoma spoke in a troubled voice for the first time.

“Then, have we met before?”

The manwoman had an incredulous expression, and thought to herself “Could that be?”, but did not voice this out loud.

“I am here because of work. Having you as my opponent will be troublesome, and moreover my stomach is full right now.”

“...Please excuse me. I am one of the Kingdom’s top-class adventurers. Upon encountering a man-eating monster, I cannot allow you to get away. Your continued existence in the human world is a problem.”

“Ah, so troublesome. But you are strong. In that case I’ll turn you into preserved food.

For the first time Entoma looked straight at the manwoman.

She couldn’t help thinking that this was a powerful warrior.

Mm, yes, definitely very strong.

Entoma was not a pure warrior, so she had no means to assess the strength of her opponent. However, she did not consider the other side to be stronger than herself.

“Oriyaaa!”

The manwoman darted over, and sent her war pick crashing downwards.

Entoma elegantly dodged the attack. But a follow-up attack immediately pursued her, with the war pick making a significant change in direction mid-swing, heading straight for Entoma. This movement was not a smooth blow relying on centrifugal force, but was instead a move purely based on an illogical amount of brute force.

Once again Entoma flashed out of the way, and activated her special ability.

“Ah!? Do you only know how to run?”

The war pick began rotating, creating a large vortex of wind which circulated above the manwoman’s head, ruffling her hair.

“Heh, do you like to spin things around and make woosh woosh sounds?”

The manwoman clicked her tongue in response to this jeering. When Entoma once again activated her skill, the hammer swung downwards from above. With some difficulty she managed to dodge and the war pick buried itself deeply into the ground after missing its target.

Entoma laughed at her using the same move. Her expression did not change, and the mocking gesture exposed their difference in strength.

That manwoman caught onto the overwhelmingly powerful Entoma’s carelessness.

“Get crushed!”

Having the spiked war pick as the epicentre, the surrounding ground began to collapse, or rather, the rocks scattered. It was like an earthquake had occurred. For the first time, Entoma was unable to maintain a leisurely posture, but the effect of the opponent’s magic item did not collapse everything.

Entoma saw the opponent uproot the sunken war pick.

She could not help getting annoyed.

She cursed her own carelessness.

Avoiding that previous attack had been incredibly easy. Humans would find it very difficult to escape the earth-shattering shock waves because the collapse of the surrounding ground would result in a loss of balance. However Entoma was a battle maid and all the magic items she possessed were high-class. This degree of destruction was insignificant to her.

However, there was one problem.

While avoiding the flying debris, the maid outfit she wore had become dirty.

Could such a matter be forgiven? This was high-class clothing bestowed to Entoma by the Supreme Beings.

So— it ends here then.

Hostility hidden under the mask of Entoma’s face emerged.

It ends here.

—Kill.

She embraced murderous intent, not the type of emotion that humans had when toying with insects. The war pick swung heavily towards Entoma.

Entoma thoughtlessly raised her left hand to block the hammer. Since she was not at the level of the Floor Guardians, simply using her left hand to block the hammer could not possibly leave her unscathed.

Then, at the moment of contact, the sound that rang out was not metal hitting flesh but rather the sound of metal colliding with a hard object.

A shield was attached to Entoma’s left hand. This was not an exaggerated metaphor. An eight legged insect had attached itself to Entoma’s wrist.

“Wh-what is this!”

“You see, I’m an entomomancer. So I can summon and use them at my will.”

She stretched out her right hand and an insect flew out from the darkness. A long bug resembling a broadsword attached itself to the back of Entoma’s right hand.

“These are blade insect and armoured insect. I originally did not plan to kill you, but you cannot be forgiven!”

Entoma took a step forward and thrust out her blade.

The manwoman’s armour cracked and blood spewed out, but this was far from being a fatal wound. She was completely unable to avoid Entoma’s serious blow but had only suffered a minor injury.

She had just declared herself to be a highest-class warrior of the Kingdom, and this was not an exaggeration. At her level, there were no longer any adversaries.

Although Entoma was not purely a warrior like Yuri, she was still a battle maid and possessed a strength far out of reach for humans.

She once again launched a slash, causing blood to spew and staining her cheeks.

This time the attack caused a wound much larger than the previous one, and was no longer a minor injury.

“Your movements changed! Is this the real you?!”

Manwoman roared again, swinging the war pick heavily downwards. However Entoma’s armoured beetle repelled the hammer. The powerful impact travelled across the manwoman’s entire body, rendering her unable to take a single step even with her full strength.

As she struggled to move, her pride ignited fierce anger within her.

The manwoman mustered the burning rage within her, smoothly launching a combination of strikes. Her attacks raged like a violent tornado. The terrifying aspect of this was that it was created through the application of ‘martial arts’ unique to this world. However, Entoma wielded her armoured beetle and blade insect with extreme proficiency, and was completely uninjured by this fifteen-combo attack.

Entoma did not know that the previous attack was Blue Rose Gagaran’s slaying move which utilised many kinds of martial arts at the same time— a Super Combo. Each surging strike had the weight of her full strength. It was capable of even breaking the martial art ‘Fortress’, and only a small number of geniuses could use the defensive skill ‘Invulnerable Fortress’ which could resist this attack. However Entoma had only relied on her naturally grown muscles to block.

This was because of the level gap between the two individuals, and also due to the absolutely overwhelming disparity between the two race’s physical capabilities.

Desperation emerged in her opponent’s eyes, but Entoma felt nothing. She only wished to kill the opponent.

"—Fuuuu~"

The manwoman gasped for air as if she had just surfaced from underwater and stopped her flurry of attacks. The blade insect on

Entoma’s right hand drew back like a bow and flew towards the manwoman’s chest like an arrow.

The target was Gagaran’s chest. The war pick rose in the air, but was as slow as a turtle. Entoma’s attack pierced Gagaran’s chest before she could respond to it.

Or so it was supposed to.

The sword cut through the air. Since the blade insect lost its target, it flew into the night.

With a “fuu”, Entoma turned her gaze to search for the intruder that had caused the interruption.

In the distance there was a girl clothed in black. Behind her was the heavily breathing manwoman.

“I’m sorry, Tia. I thought I was done for.”

“Surprisingly, it seems that the blood flowing through Gagaran really is red~”

“You rascal! You’ve seen me injured many times before!”

“I even thought you would bleed green blood. Power Up!”

“Rather than ‘Powerup’ that would be more like a race change!”

“Class change then!”

Hearing their relaxed conversation, Entoma could not help but feel anxious. As a powerful adversary herself, it was necessary to clearly demonstrate the difference in strength at a glance whilst at the same time quickly defining her own position.

“Well, it’s about time to end this. Did you say your farewells?”

For the first time, Entoma assumed a fighting posture. The manwoman — Gagaran — was not a frightening adversary; the problem was the newcomer— Tia. If her clothing was not that of an assassin, then it was that of a ninja. The pre-requisite of that job class was level sixty.

If she really was a ninja, then even Entoma would not be able to obtain an easy victory. Now was not the time to be saying “Ending this fight by holding back on full strength!”

“「Spider Talisman」!”

Entoma’s movements were even faster than the opponent as she activated the four pieces of talisman held in her right hand.

The moment the talisman fell onto the ground, it turned into an enormous spider.

The level of this spell was equivalent to a ‘3rd tier Summon Monster’ spell, because the creature summoned was not a powerful monster, but would already be a great help in testing the opponent’s true strength. Furthermore it would allow her to buy some time to prepare for battle.

Although insect-made weapons were powerful, they had many weaknesses. One was that the weapon summoning consumed a large amount of time.

“「Shadow Clone」.”

Just as Tia’s ninjutsu skill activated, her image shimmered and another ‘Tia’ appeared in the original spot.

All this time Entoma had been wary of Tia. Clones from the ‘Shadow Clone’ skill had roughly one quarter of the original body’s battle power, but only the shadow’s evading ability was determined by the amount of magic power granted to it by the main body, nothing more. This shadow might be a strong opponent for the talisman spider, but for Entoma it was a piece of cake.

However, the real problem was how well the original body was capable of fighting. Entoma summoned her killer weapon— steel projectile insects. At the same time, she attached a talisman to herself and began to strengthen her ability.

Steel projectile insects flew out from an unknown spot and densely covered her left wrist.

These were three centimetre long insects that had a metallic shine, with a triangle-shaped body and razor sharp tip. Its appearance was very similar to that of a bullet. As for this insect’s use, of course, was consistent with its bullet-like form.

In order to avoid the talisman spider’s attacks, the shadow clone had to use its full strength, and the main body had to join the fight alongside the clone. After a long while of battling like this, they only managed to kill one talisman spider, so it seemed that her level was not any higher than Entoma’s. If this was the case, even if the battle against Gagaran were to resume, victory would still be certain.

—*Looks like it’s all as I had predicted.*

No mercy. Using overwhelming strength to bring about a speedy victory.

The heaviness on her left hand brought satisfaction to Entoma and she pointed directly at Tia.

Entoma’s left wrist was several times thicker than normal because of the bugs covering it. Following her movement, all of the insects began to move in unison from her wrist, rushing into the sky. Gathering into groups, the insects’ wings gave off a sound similar to an automatic gun. Even the ally talisman spider which was within firing range was ruthlessly mowed down, and within a moment, a total of one hundred and fifty insects made their way towards Tia.

A single insect was enough to puncture steel, and these one hundred and fifty insects could even pierce through a gigantic tree. In the face of this deadly barrage of bullets, Tia activated her ninjutsu.

“「Immovable Adamantine Shield」!”

A large shield radiating with multiple colours appeared in front of Tia.

This radiance was enough to split apart the large dark hexagonal shield, creating a collision with the insect swarm. In an instant, the shield shattered with a crisp sound, but also at this moment the insect bulletstorm stagnated, and Tia who was standing behind was uninjured.

Entoma couldn’t resist but metaphorically click her tongue even though she didn’t actually possess one. Forcing her opponents to reveal their hidden trump cards one by one would eventually illuminate the path to victory. Although her current attacks were being dealt with for now, the moment her attack pierces through, they would be swept away like a flood from a broken dyke.

She used the blade insect to deflect the incoming kunai and the insect shield was then used to defend against Gagaran’s blow which came from above. It was an exceptionally mighty blow which descended from above, causing significant damage to the armored bug which screeched out in pain.

Her eyes should have been blinded because of the dazzling light given off by the adamantite shield, and therefore it should have been impossible to defend against Gagaran’s surprise attack. However Entoma’s eyes were not affected by something of this degree. Her field of vision was wider than that of humans, and was able to cover the direction of this attack.

At the same moment that she determined this pursuing attack to be incredibly dangerous, her body glided away as if she was on top of a lake — seemingly without even moving her feet, her body had already pulled a considerable distance away from Gagaran. Although Gagaran possessed a large physique, her movements were lithe and she had almost completely recovered from her wounds. She stood beside Tia, crushing the steel bullet insects which made bursting sounds, as she spoke in a cold voice:

“This isn’t good; I’m not sure if we can win against her. What was that just now? Wasn’t our timing perfect? She was obviously unable to see in this direction, yet was still able to block.”

“A wide field of vision perhaps?”

“Rather than that, it seems more plausible that there are other reasons though. She has insect abilities, so it seems more likely that she used some kind of special sensory magic… Speaking of which, she possesses an overwhelming advantage. Why didn’t she attack us while we were talking?

“Only a true predator would go for the kill after determining the opponent’s true strength.”

“So that’s it. She’s waiting to see the true extent of our strength, very different to our chibi-chan. This cautious fellow really is a troublesome.”

“To be made light of by mere humans to such an extent is really distasteful. Well, there are other reasons but… Hora, come forth. In that case these insects aren’t needed anymore.”

The insects attached to Entoma’s right wrist dropped to the ground one after another, and disappeared into the darkness with a rustling noise.

“In place of that... Come forth.”

An insect as long as a centipede slowly wrapped around her wrist. Its body length was over ten metres long, the front end had abnormally sharp teeth and its eyes were still closed.

This was the strongest insect that she, an entomomancer, could summon — the thousand whips insect.

Entoma put strength in both her legs. She had already figured out the attack speed, offensive ability, defensive ability, evasive ability and movement speed of the two humans before her. Although she was not too certain about Tia’s ability to adapt to new situations, it was not enough to frighten her.

“Ah.”

Entoma used her hand to touch her chin, which was covered in transparent sticky fluid.

“Earlier, my stomach was definitely full. After a bit of exercise, it’s beginning to squeeze in hunger.”

Stuck on her hand was her saliva. This was the clearest evidence that she craved humans as her prey.

Humans were her favourite food. Until this moment, she had only been able to feast on vegetable fritters in order to satisfy her desires, but of course she did not come to hate the Supreme Being because of this. Furthermore, she was given permission to eat one of the human wrists which had been severed during the healing experiments, taken from a man who had been nabbed from a random village. She thought of this as a personal sign of great kindness from Ainz-sama.

For Entoma who had been restraining herself all along, the elite humans in front of her were food of the highest quality. She could not simply discard them without taking a single bite first!

The two persons who were bathed in Entoma’s ravenous gaze could not help but shudder. This was not the timid reaction of facing a powerful enemy’s murderous intent, but rather the naturally-occurring psychological aversion of being seen as a living creature’s predatorial target. And this made them shiver involuntarily.

“Aaaaaaaaaahhhh!”

Her high-pitched screech was as fast as the sound of a snapping styrofoam board. This was the first time that Entoma had initiated an attack since the beginning of the battle. As a predator in the act of capturing her prey, she charged directly at an incredibly fast speed.

She used the insect shield to block six consecutively launched kunai, and drew close to her targets.

When she saw Gagaran swinging her weapon and stepping forward to stand as the vanguard, Entoma had already decided which opponent she would deprive of their combat ability first.

Her right hand brandished a whip. If it were a long whip, the speed of the whip’s end would be relatively slow. This was to be expected even if it was used by Entoma who possessed superhuman strength. However this was only logical if what was brandished was an ordinary whip.

The being that was waved around was the most powerful insect the entomomancer Entoma could summon—

Originally it was supposed to be a whip with the rough shape of an arc, but it turned out to shoot out at an unimaginable angle. This whip was like an extension of Entoma’s hand, and bent in an S shape, before it launched at Gagaran with the speed of lightning.

It was a living creature at the same time as it was a weapon, and struck in an unnatural way for a weapon. Even greatly experienced adventurers had never heard of this, let alone experienced facing it before. When seeing it for the first time, not knowing what to do was the natural reaction.

But the fact they could dodge it proved they were indeed adamantite adventurers.

The insect whip was about to hit the side of Gagaran’s body, however she stumbled to avoid the attack.

“Be careful!”

—Accompanying Tia’s loud yell, Gagaran was blown upwards. This was Tia’s ninjutsu skill — ‘Bursting Flame Column’. The seemingly selfimploding explosion and flames encircled the two, and the thousand whips insect, which had done a one-eighty degree change in direction from behind Gagaran, only managed to strike the spot where her head had been.

If it hadn’t been for this almost suicidal move, there was no doubt that Gagaran’s head would have been pierced by the thousand whips insect. It was a great dodge. However, Entoma’s attack wasn’t finished. As if it was being pulled by strings, the thousand whips insect attacked from angles that were hard to defend against, changing constantly as it took cheap shots at Gagaran.

At the same time, Entoma threw a talisman at Tia — a thunderbird talisman.

In mid-air, the talisman turned into a small bird that emitted bluish-white electricity, and sprang towards Tia.

If there were two opponents, let one of them be taken care of by the insects. This was where the strengths of entomomancers lay.

There was an explosion of lightning, and the blue-white radiance spread in all directions. What emerged were Tia, who was enduring her pain, and Gagaran, who was having a hard time fending off the thousand whips insect.

“Dammit! This insect is really annoying!”

Gagaran’s head was pushed against her war pick, and her body was wrapped up by the ten meter long insect in a way that rendered her unable to move.

Tia took a step forward and stabbed with her magic dagger. The strike collided with Entoma’s insect shield and let out a fierce metallic sound.

“Flurry of thunderbird talismans~”

Entoma held a number of talismans in her left hand and tossed them outwards. The talismans turned into many thunderbirds which were smaller than the previous one. They rushed towards Tia, who proceeded to conceal herself. Unable to find their target, the small birds flew in the direction behind Tia.

Tia suddenly appeared behind Entoma from a shadow out of her line of sight. This was an ability which utilised shadows to traverse short distances. However Entoma had already noticed this because some insects’ antennae could sense the surrounding airflow. This was a powerful sensing ability which Entoma possessed.

She tossed the remaining few steel bullet insects at Tia who emerged from the shadow.

“Ku...!”

A pained groan came from the shadow and the smell of fresh blood wafted in the air. Facing Tia, who was bloodied but still held the will to fight, Entoma initiated her follow-up attack.

“Scattering explosion talisman!”

Even more powerful explosions than before appeared in front of Tia, lighting up the dark night. Against Tia who had been blown away and fallen on the floor, Entoma once again threw a sharp cutting talisman and a rushing wind talisman. Tia was covered in blood and didn’t even have the time to get up before she was sliced again, blown away and thrown on the ground.

“Tia! You insect bitch!”

The condemning voice came from Gagaran, who was wound tightly into a ball by the whip insect.

Their original plan was that while Gagaran used her brute strength to restrain the whip insect, Tia would seize the opportunity to launch a surprise attack on Entoma’s main body.

Entoma ridiculed this under her mask.

Such foolish beings. As a battle maid of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, triumphing over humans of this level was only to be expected. The best option for them should have been ignoring the fact she was eating human flesh and running away with all their strength. It was only because they had made the incorrect choice, that this scenario had unfolded.

“...Although the order is different to what I had envisaged, so be it, nothing more could be done. Well then, which one should I eat first? Developed muscles must taste extremely delicious ne~”

Entoma once again summoned an insect, but not the type that had ferocious combat capability. The long syringe needle on its body contained sedatives.

Entoma held the insect and briskly walked over to Tia.

It looked like she could bring home some local specialties as souvenirs. There were many in the Great Tomb of Nazarick who relished in capturing humans for food.

They would certainly like this present very much.

“Eh? What?”

Entoma’s superior intuition warned her of an elongated cold object flying in her direction from above her head and she rapidly sprung a distance away. At the same time, a lengthy weapon pierced the spot Entoma had just occupied.

It was like a crystal lance used by knights, but that was not an ordinary item. Not the slightest crack could be seen on the crystal lance which had managed to crush rocks.

“Is that… magic?”

The spirit system magic caster Entoma felt something from this lance.

“You’re correct. This is the 4th tier spell ‘Crystal Lance’!”

The one replying to Entoma’s question was the person who slowly descended to the rocks shattered by the lance. It was a young girl with a boyish voice, whose physique was small and who wore a mask and a robe.

Yet another enemy, Entoma couldn’t help muttering. Another intruder had appeared in the middle of capturing delicious prey. It was truly cruel that she still had to endure the temptations of delicious food.

“Shall we end it here?”

“...Who are you? I can forgive you if you immediately leave this place. Children are very soft, and I like that, but they never have enough meat on them. I’ll play with you next time, after I eat these two.”

“So that’s what you are; a man-eating monster right? Even wearing a maid outfit, what kind of joke are you trying to pull? Who’d want some bloody smelling monster like you around them?”

“wHAT arE yOu SAYInG?! bItCH!”

Without pausing to think, Entoma let out her real voice, then immediately clamped down on her own throat.

The insult was enough to make her lose her composure and she could never forgive this young girl’s words. It was not because of primal predator urges, but because she was in an extremely bad mood right now, that she wanted to tear apart the woman before her into pieces.

What did this woman say?! To me, a battle maid, which is a high-level existence within the Great Tomb of Nazarick!?

Anger spilled out from the bottom of her heart.

“I’LL kiLL yOu!”

She could not help but to shout with her real voice, but restrained herself from puffing up in the back.

“Evileye!”

Tia shouted out the masked girl’s name. Entoma spoke towards the enemy whom she was already determined to exterminate with her full might:

“I was wondering what you were up to...my, my, doing your lesson 1 huh. It looks like you were assessing the difference in strength between you and your opponents. You must be thinking that ‘this one is stronger than the ones before... but still weaker than me’, right.”

Hearing Entoma’s provocation, Evileye could not hold back shouting out:

“So my companions really were under your ‘care’? You monster. Come, allow me to give you a taste of being the victim of abuse.”

Entoma had no idea that a fierce rage was burning under the mask of her opponent.

Entoma, who was seriously wound up with the intention to kill, ran forward. In her mind dominated by hatred, the other two persons had already become annoyances on the same level as pebbles by the roadside.

She actually said that nobody would enjoy my company!?

The same words repeated over and over again in her mind.

At the same time, the insect whip began to move. Entoma left about one-metre, and formed the rest into a large sphere. Of course Gagaran was in the core part of this shape.

“Die alongside your companions, you unpleasant woman!”

She swung the thousand whips insect down like a hammer.

“Hmph. What a boring attack.”

Evileye remained relaxed.

“「Reverse Gravity」.”

Entoma resisted the magic, but the insect whip lost its gravitational weight and floated upwards.

If the equipment user had successfully resisted, the equipment would likewise be resistant. However in the case of insect weapons, it was not the equipment user but rather the insects themselves which had to do the resisting.

Since it was like this, even if Entoma would not be affected, it would still influence the insect weapon. This was one of the shortcomings, although the insects could attack autonomously.

Even if it was Entoma, she needed to discard her original plan when facing magics like this.

Sensing Entoma’s intention, the insect whip gracefully removed itself from Gagaran. With the speed of a retracting measuring tape, it had formed a ten-metre long insect whip stance. While this was happening, Evileye gave directions to Gagaran who was still tumbling on the ground.

“Gagaran! Get out of the way! Go and quickly tend to Tia’s wounds! If you already used up your gauntlets’ power, then use a recovery potion!”

The injured humans had recovered. If it was only that, then there would be no problem. The fact that the two people were Entoma’s enemies had not changed, but considering the words of the magic caster in front of her, the situation was different.

Evileye and Entoma were on the same level. If they were to help the magic caster, the situation would become unfavourable.

This time, Entoma decided to make use of her ultimate trump card which she was reluctant to use.

She had already used it to eliminate all enemies inside the mansion with a single breath, leaving behind two more instances when she could use it.

That was the breath given off by carnivorous flies, fly breath.

Such breath wasn’t emitted for the sake of eating the meat, but flies would embed their maggot offsprings into the flesh. The maggots would continue to inflict damage from inside of the victim’s body. Even more terrifying was the next step, where a large swarm of flies would emerge from the corpse, then indiscriminately attack other beings inside the area of effect, with the exception of the ability user.

Entoma widened her throat. Her true mouth which did the speaking was in fact her lower jaw. To others, it was a terrifying sight, as if her jaw had slip apart.

From there she spat out swarm of flies.

“You! Could that power be associated with the demon gods! In that case!”

Evileye, who was retaliating released a white mist.

Although using cold gas to counter the attack was an extremely clever move, to completely nullify the effects was very difficult. The most appropriate magic to use would have been explosive magic to roast the entire swarm of flies.

Her opponent had made a mistake.

Entoma’s mind had already visualised a scenario where Evileye was devoured by the maggots, but the counter-magic used was far beyond her expectations.

All of the flies coated in the white mist fell out of the air, then the mist engulfed Entoma. In that moment, Entoma felt unbearably intense pain.

“Uwaaaaaaahhhh!”

The entomomancer maid’s face steamed as if acid had been splash on it.

At first the objective had been to nullify the opponent’s gas spittle, and they hadn’t expected that it would even reveal the enemy’s true face…

“Hey, hey, could this be our chance?”

Gagaran who had assumed a fighting stance with her war pick and searched for an opportunity to decisively end the fight. If she had realistically estimated her opponent’s strength, it was necessary to end the fight in one fell swoop.

Gagaran did not pursue with an attack because the ten-metre long giant insect whip began to move violently, not permitting her to get any closer. However, this was nothing but the spasming of a defeated person.

“This...what kind of magic is it?”

Evileye replied to Entoma’s question.

“Insecticide magic ‘Vermin Bane’. Two hundred years ago there was an insect demon god, and this magic was developed for the purpose of repelling the insects used by that individual. Well, it’s an original magic I came up with.”

“Hey! It should be harmless for us right?”

“Harmless indeed. It is especially effective on insects, but doesn’t cause the slightest harm to other organisms.”

“...Her face has melted.”

“Tia, that is her true face… Huh! No, that’s not the face!”

As Evileye shouted out, the maid’s entire face fell off, like a scene where the facial skin had been stripped off and dropped onto the ground. There was a difference though. The facial skin which fell onto the ground had many insect legs on the backside.

“That can’t be… it’s a mask shaped insect…”

“kAHoooOOoH!”

The maid’s throat exposed itself. A single crack appeared in the seemingly hard throat, and a large liquid chunk of matter fell out. It looked like vomit, but the biggest distinction from that was the fact that this object was still crawling on the ground.

“What the…”

This really was startling, even for Evileye who was stunned by surprise. It was the first time she had seen such a sight in her long existence.

“—Lip insect.”

Tia exclaimed towards the mucus-covered leech-like creature which had fallen on the stone-paved road.

“An insect which consumes human vocal chords and imitate the voice of its victims.”

The front end of the flesh coloured leech had a section which looked like a human’s lips. With an “ah, ah”, it gave out the maid’s cute voice.

In full gaze of everybody, the maid’s hands which covered her face slowly lowered, revealing an appearance that was exactly the same as an insect’s.

The frightful appearance made the Blue Rose members involuntarily take a step backwards. Although they had already experienced terror when the mask insect fell off due to the insecticide magic, this sight ignited their fear again.

A monster from beyond this world had invaded. They couldn’t help but feel a shadow cast over this world.

“yoU ACTUallY, YoU actUally Dare…”

The rigid voice difficult to listen to.

“Didn’t her voice become rather cute? Personally, I rather like this voice.”

Gagaran’s hostility was on the verge of eruption. She was the most humane member of the Blue Rose. She was filled with an emotion as she prayed for the soul of the young girl who was sacrificed to give the mouth-lip insect a voice and clenched her weapon even tighter.

“hOw dArE YoU MeRe hUmAnS AaAaAhHhHh!”

In previous battles she had always fought her enemy with ease. However at this moment she didn’t have such a leisurely spirit.

Well, there was no longer any need to hold back. Time to commence a fierce attack.

“The real battle starts now! Neither of you two should relax! Prepare to launch even more fierce attacks than before!”

Evileye cautioned the other two, but they had already predicted this before she had spoken. To ready their resolve for a fight to the death!

The insect maid’s back suddenly burst out, and four spider legs extended from beneath her clothing. This posture looked as if her back had sprouted new legs.

With these newborn feet, she jumped extremely high. For anyone looking, they would have drawn the conclusion that this was the effect of flight magic.

From above, the monster spat carnivorous flies at the people.

Clicking her tongue, Evileye casted ‘Vermin Bane’ once more.

“OnLy To yOu GuYs! i WIlL Show YOu WhaT TRUe TERrOR MEAnS! aftER KIlliNG YOu GuYS i WiLl TUrN You AlL into COrpse DoLLs!”

As soon as they had reached the ground, the carnivorous flies were completely obliterated. The insect maid used her compound eyes to glare at Evileye’s true face. Indeed, only Evileye was comparable in strength to this monster. If Evileye were to lose, then needless to say victory would be impossible, and both Gagaran and Tia would be massacred. However, it would be foolish to just focus on one thing.

Gagaran’s spiked war pick came from the side.

Even if Evileye had an advantage, they could not afford to waste opportunities against such a powerful opponent.

She knew that it was very probable that she would suffer serious injuries if she was intercepted. That was why she chose to fight alongside her companions. Evileye smiled at them from under her mask. If she were to be unmasked, others would definitely make fun of her smile.

The monster which was about to evade Gagaran’s strike suddenly stopped moving. That was because of Tia’s ninjutsu skill, ‘Immobility

Binding Paralysis’. The monster had a high level of resistance, more like a nullifying ability, so it was impossible to seal its movements completely. However creating an opening even for a brief moment would be sufficient support for Gagaran.

The monster spat out white silk enhanced with ‘Powerful Strike’ from her mouth. There was enough to dye Gagaran’s upper body white.

Gagaran found it difficult to break out from the rigid and adhesive spider silk by herself. Her attack was interrupted, and she staggered as she retreated. In contrast, the monster came towards her.

“「Crystal Lance」!”

Although it had embedded deep in Entoma, she did not appear to be in huge amount of pain. She calmly summoned insects which appeared from the darkness and gathered densely on her wrist in a bulging mass.

“「Vermin Bane」!”

The white gas blew over and the insects fell one by one. The monster involuntarily let out an excruciating cry of pain.

The mouth in the equivalent place of a human’s lower jaw spat out the same kind of spider silk towards Evileye as it did to Gagaran.

If I used magic to block this, it would simply be a waste of magic power. Since I can nullify any restraining magic. I can probably take this shot— wait, this isn't—

In a panic, Evileye activated her magic. Yes indeed silky material was spat out, but compared to the ones which were shot towards Gagaran, these threads exuded a rigid radiance.

“「Crystal Wall」!”

The crystal barrier in front of her split apart as if it had been cut apart by a sharp blade, and shattered into nothingness.

“Is that a slashing spider web!?”

“A present for you!”

The black wire mesh Tia threw expanded in mid-air, but failed to envelop the monster. Entoma simply passed through it like a phantom.

“Sure enough, she’s immune to any obstructing techniques!”

“Bah! Combat formation time!”

In order to maintain a distance from the battle maid who was closing in on her, Gagaran, kicked with the intention of pushing away her opponent.

Her boot collided with the maid, creating an astonishing metallic sound.

Gagaran retreated while focusing on maintaining the distance whilst joining up with the rest of the Blue Rose members. They gathered while paying careful attention for any area of effect attack.

"ChIKu, cHIkU, tHesE AtTAcks ...... So AnNOyiNg!!"

Whilst observing the maid’s jaw mouth which was muttering non-stop, Gagaran whispered to Evileye:

“Did you hear that sound just now? Her maid costume is just as hard as my armor; truly unbelievable.”

“It must be woven together with sturdy metal wires. Considering how thin it is, its hardness must be far above that.”

“Adamantite… looks like it is far above that too.”

“Oh, so it’s not just at the same level? The equipment is of such an unimaginably high quality that my earth magic is not of much use. She’s probably wearing equipment that reduces magic damage, too. Specialized attacks probably won’t affect her that much..”

“That means?”

Tia’s doubt made Evileye smile under her mask.

“We’ll finish this head on with overwhelming fire power.”

“That’s easier said than done, isn’t it? How do we pull it off? We are done for if we don’t act soon. It also uses talismans to strengthen itself.

“Everybody use your own most powerful technique! I’m going to use the insecticide magic.”

“...That’s easy to understand. Well, let’s go for our final strike.”

Although they said they would strike with overwhelming firepower in a single strike, in reality it was not that simple.

In general Evileye used ‘Sand Field: One’ or ‘Region Petrification’ to hinder the enemy, and support the warriors, but these methods would not work against that maid.

If they wanted to inflict damage, it would best to leave it to warriors like Gagaran to inflict physical damage. Evileye only needed to come up with contingency plan in case this strategy did not work. She had always believed focusing purely on attack magic was wrong, but the situation called for a desperate measure,

Magic casters that rely purely on magic to attack are second rate. This is what I personally think, but this time I will have to compromise.

Evileye began to adjust herself to the magic she was about to use.

Even though ‘Shard Buck Shots’ was the most effective method of attack, but her teammates would also be caught in the area of effect. The mana consumption of her original spell, ‘Vermin Bane’ was extremely large and was best reserved for when the opponent was about to summon insects. This meant that right now the most appropriate kind of skill to use was the hated acid-type magic.

The three exchanged a brief glance, confirming that their preparations were complete, and attacked together.

Evileye used ‘Acid Splash’ as her main attack whereas Tia, who had weaker firepower, mainly relied on her supporting items. Gagaran continuously activated martial arts, executing an unending barrage of attacks.

After a while, the tide of battle began to shift.

The opponent was indeed incredibly strong. Many types of spider webs, talisman-based magic attacks and summoned insects were launched in her offensive attack. Not to mention that her magic items were more powerful than those possessed by the members of Blue Rose.

Eventhough the number of consumables like recovery potions were starting to run out, the insect maid steadily began to retreat.

If one was to ask what had caused the tide of battle to shift in her favour, Evileye would puff out her chest and reply “Companions!”

There was no doubt that Gagaran, Tia and Evileye were of an inferior race compared to this monster, but they still created opportunities nonetheless. Being able to attack and recover at the same time created a favourable situation.

In particular, having the means to do self-recovery and having supporting recovery through teammates was an enormous advantage. Gradually the situation became certain.

“As long as we don’t screw up, we can beat her like this!”

Part 3

Lower Fire Month (9th Month) 4th Day, 22:27

The outcome of the battle.

Finally, the insect maid collapsed to the ground like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

Evileye’s mana consumption had been severe, and her consumables were almost depleted. From an economic standpoint, she was in a serious amount of debt.

“We’ve won!”

Gagaran who was covered in wounds declared their victory with heavy breaths. Not a single recovery potion was left, and she had external injuries, but her physical stamina was still holding up.

“Stab her throat.”

“Yes.”

Evileye agreed with Tia’s suggestion. The dying insect maid was still alive, as evidenced by the maid making chirping “Yeeh yeeh” sounds.

In this situation where it had already lost its ability to fight, the safest and most secure thing to do was to kill it without hesitation.

Tia who had taken up her sword and gone forward suddenly froze. Before Evileye could even ask “What is it?”, she already knew the reason for why she had stopped her movements.

“How about we end this right here.”

Unbelievably, and without anyone knowing when he had appeared, a man stood in front of the insect maid.

He wore strange clothing which had never been seen before. In Evileye’s knowledge, this was a set of garments which was worn in the south - a full suit. He also wore a mask which made it impossible to see his face.

However he was not human. A tail sprouted from his waist.

“Hey, a relative of Evileye?”

You idiot! Evileye hesitated. His dominating presence hit her as if her entire body had been struck by lightning. If she were to look at her right hand, she would discover that it was covered in sweat.

“—Are you alright? Leave the rest to me. You go back first to recuperate.”

He ignored the armed Blue Rose members standing in front of him and spoke in a kind tone to the insect maid. Although he was the enemy, he gave others a good impression of himself. However, Evileye knew that this wasn’t the case.

The tingling sense of fear reached the tip of her very toes, and this feeling was very real.

With her survival instincts screaming at her, she held her breath then spoke with a grim determination to Gagaran and Tia who were standing to one side.

“...Escape! ...Fools, ignore the fact that I am here and listen quietly. That… is an overwhelmingly powerful existence. A monster amongst monsters. No matter what happens behind you, use your full strength to escape.”

“...Then what about you?”

Gagaran asked with a bitter voice.

“Don’t worry about that. I will drag this out until you escape, then immediately use ‘Teleport’ to get out of here.”

Not knowing what she had done, the injured insect maid which was not supposed to be able to move unsteadily stood up. She was not seen using any healing magic, nor did it seem like she had consumed any item.

Out of nowhere an insect appeared which attached itself to the insect maid’s back. Leaving behind a few “yeeh yeeh” sounds, she flew away into the night.

Helplessly watching her escape, Evileye was unable to take any action because of this man standing in front of her. The other two were the same, with their foreheads drenched in sweat and their bodies petrified, unable to move.

After watching the maid depart, the man turned towards Evileye.

Having lived for over two-hundred and fifty years, she had come across powerful beings of all sorts. Even so, the aura he gave out was exceptional. No, this was a nauseating and revolting maliciousness which, compared to others, was at an impossible level.

As a powerful being, he should be at the same level as the Platinum Dragon Lord right? Because he is far too powerful, it is already unclear which is stronger.

“You’ve waited long enough. Now then, since time is tight, shall we begin right away?”

“Quick! Escape!!!”

Evileye cried out.

The two turned around and fled like wild dogs. There was no way that they did not feel guilty about leaving a companion behind. It was precisely because of this guilt that they had only chosen to escape immediately after Evileye had finished speaking. Trust! If it was Evileye, anything could be done. If it was Evileye, escape should be possible!

However this thought was immediately overturned.

“Firstly, don’t leave during introductions. It’s not that painful, let me block your transfer,
「Dimensional Lock」. Giving a greeting before departing is the proper etiquette, and delightful.”

This was a skill which could only be used by the highest ranking devils or angels, and had the area effect of preventing anyone in the surrounding from using transfer magic. Evileye and her team’s retreating strategy was rendered useless.

However this was not the main problem. They knew since the beginning that the best strategy would be to leave someone behind as rearguard, and that it was impossible for that person to return alive.

“Death is also natural. The young survive whereas the elderly die. That is the proper course of nature.”

With a life experience of more than two hundred years, the girl bid her farewell as she provoked the opponent in front of her which she stood no chance against.

“Now then, ladies first. But if you plan to do nothing, allow me to make my attack.”

A terrifying amount of murderous intent spewed out from between his words. Evileye mentally collected herself, expelling the sense of dread from inside of her.

I am Evileye. A woman of legends. No matter how strong the enemy is— fight!

“Such kind intentions, then I shall act pre-emptively! Eat this! 「Maximize Magic: Shard Buck Shots」!”

She used the spell she was proud of from the outstart. Many crystals smaller than the size of a fist shot out in a scattered pattern.

These were crystal fragments with sharp front ends. Originally it would be used in close-quarter combat to inflict enormous harm, but it was unclear how to get close to this archdevil in front of them.

Although she had hardened her resolve, she still held herself back a bit. Evileye mocked herself. The enemy’s strength was unknown, so fighting cautiously was only natural.

The masked devil opened his arms wide in a welcoming gesture. The hail of crystal bullets arrived in front of him— and the magic spell disappeared. The magic disappeared so fast that it was as if it had never existed.

“Is that a racial talent, magic invalidation!? Or is it because the difference in strength is actually this large!?”

If there was a significant gap in strength, magic would easily be rendered ineffective.

Ignoring Evileye who had made a mistake on her first move, the man elegantly stretched his arms out sideways in a stance similar to that of a commander and acted:

“「Hellfire Wall」.”

The heatwave pounced in a direction behind her. The incredulous Evileye frantically looked backwards.

With a swishing noise, the night combusted and black flames which could not possibly exist burned.

They surrounded the fleeing Gagaran and Tia who struggled momentarily before gradually falling onto the ground like garbage. The flames disappeared as if they had been an illusion all along, and the two had already stopped moving and breathing. She strongly suppressed her own desire to immediately rush over to check their conditions. Evileye deeply understood the meaning behind the phrase ‘not daring to believe, yet impossible to deny reality’. That was a fatal injury. With a single strike, her companions, with whom she had gone through thick and thin, had been slaughtered.

She gritted her teeth, not letting herself make any sorrowful sounds.

“I merely tried to stop them with all my strength, but they were weaker than I had imagined and died from flames of that degree. Please accept my remorse.”

As if he was apologetic from the bottom of his heart, the man bowed deeply. Such an attitude made Evileye unable to suppress her own emotions.

What could possibly be the reason for him to disregard Evileye, who was the opponent in front of him that launched an attack, and instead strike at the two persons behind her? Escape was indeed one of the reasons, but in addition to that there was another.

He knew clearly just how big the difference strength between us was, and knew that I posed no threat to him whatsoever. But in reality… he did not even regard the person in front of him to be ‘the enemy’.

Since they were fleeing in front of him, he killed them first. The train of thought was just that simple.

“...So difficult. Dying from such a degree of injury, I can’t use you as the standard of measure... Why would you team up with those that are weaker? If you didn’t do this, wouldn’t you be able to challenge even higher-level areas?”

“—You! You! You! You are not permitted to say this!!! Waaaaaaahhhhhh!”

This was not a cry of sorrow but a howl of anger. Full of hatred and shouting loudly, Evileye ran forward. It would be more accurate to say that she used magic power to glide through the air. Injecting magic into her fist, she accumulated “invalidation” and “difficult resistance” melee magic.

The devil raised his hand to receive the blow.

“Aspect of the Devil: Archdemon’s Wrist.”

The devil’s wrist expanded multiple times and the enlarged arm hung down until it reached the ground. That cracking noise was not because it was inflated with air, but because it had turned into an extremely hard lethal weapon.

With the lethal weapon blocking the front, Evileye’s advance was stopped. Her heart wavered for a moment, but immediately she hardened her resolve to seize this opportunity!

The enormous wrist closed in on Evileye. With a speed beyond imagination, it was like a huge wall stretching endlessly within sight. As it was unavoidable, Evileye made a split-second decision and activated her defensive magic.

“「Translocation Damage」!”

Darkness covered her sight at the same time as she was sent flying by a strong impact, making her disorientated and not knowing where she was. Her body was thrown onto the stone-paved road and bounced up like a ball before being sent flying by another impact.

But there was — no damage.

Evileye activated the magic ‘Flight’ and flew up in an awkward and unnatural posture.

She had not been injured, but if she had not used a spell that turned physical damage into mana loss, she would have already been dead.

“「Enhanced Maximize Magic: Crystal Dagger」!”

A larger crystal dagger than the one before appeared in mid-air and shot out! This sword did purely physical damage and could not be resisted. On top of this, by further applying special magic skills, it was able to easily break through defences.

Without evading, the devil took the attack head on. Although he had received magic with the greatest damage output, not the slightest effect could be seen on the devil.

“...No injury even when defense shattering magic was applied? ...It is a superior devil exceeding imagination… No, even greater than the demon king! It should be the Demon God King right?”

Although a king wasn’t necessarily stronger than everything else, it was common sense in this world that having this as part of the name meant that it was the strongest of the race. Humans were basically the only ones where the weak could proclaim themselves as king.

“Aspect of the Devil: Razor Sharp Claw.”

The devil’s claws elongated, stretching beyond eighty centimetres. Evileye could not help feeling that these claws were unstoppable and could tear anything in the world apart.

I can’t retrieve those two’s corpses and get away. Even if others arrived, they would not be strong enough to face this person. I can at least move away from the battlefield and make it easier for others to discover their corpses...

The corners of Evileye’s mouth curled upwards.

The worst scenario would be allowing Lakyus, who was able to use revival magic, to meet this devil. That could never be allowed to happen.

“I’m coming!”

Just as Evileye was bracing herself to charge forward— a sharp sound rang out as something fell in between the two of them.

Unable to withstand the weight, cracks appeared on the stone paved road and dust billowed about.

There, with his body bent over because of the impact of landing, stood a single warrior.

The serene moonlight reflected off the dark armour, causing it to flash with a dazzling beautiful radiance. A cloak, as red as a burning flame, billowed in the night air. Both hands were separately grasping gigantic swords which shone with an incredible brilliant light.

Slowly, the dark warrior stood up. His body build was tall, about the same height as the devil. However that divine radiance made the devil retract his body, and Evileye caught a glimpse of the powerful demon turn fearful at the moment that the dark warrior had appeared. That expression was as if he had seen something beyond his imagination.

In the silence, Evileye heard the sound of saliva being gulped. This sound was from the devil. The devil which had exceeded Evileye’s imagination was holding in its breath in front of this burly warrior.

A cold, penetrating voice pierced through the darkness.

“Let’s see… who is my enemy?”

Intermission

A room that befits the extravagant description.

The red carpet that covered the entire room was so soft you could feel your feet sinking into it. Two chairs were placed inside the room, made from high quality wood carved in the style of French Rococo, the black chairs gleaming in a way unique to treated leather.

The man on the chair stretched his legs and laid back into his seat.

A pretty face. If someone sketched his appearance perfectly, that would be how others think of him.

His blonde hair reflected the magical illumination, just like the shine of the stars. His clear purple eyes were like amethysts, tempting the people who looked at him.

However, people who actually saw him in person would have a different impression other than a pretty face. Basked in his aura of a natural leader that had nothing to do with his face, no one would have a different impression.

And that, was one of a ‘ruler’.
He was Jircniv Rune Farlord el Nix.

The reigning emperor at the age of 22, feared by the aristocrats and respected by the citizens, the most talented emperor of all times. He was also the one who purged the nobles within the Empire, a man feared by the neighbouring country as the Bloody Emperor.

There were four other men aside from Jircniv in the room, but all of them stood as still as statues .

Jircniv shifted his eyes away from the paper he had been reading and gazed into the distance. As if there was a blackboard before him, he started writing his thoughts on it.

Jircniv exhaled with his nose shortly after. That was either a mocking or curious noise.

The information he received from the Kingdom was something that made him show such an attitude.
At that moment—

Without any knocking, the door opened.
This impudent action made the servants lower their stance and watch the door with hostility. But after confirming the identity of the one entering, they lowered their guard.

The one entering was an old man half their height with a long white beard. He still had a full head of snow white hair.

His age was shown on his face as wrinkles, and the light of wisdom could be seen in his eyes. On his neck was a necklace made with numerous crystal balls.

On his dried up fingers were several plain rings. The loose white robe he wore was made from a very soft material.

This was the image of a magic caster for those who were ignorant.

“—It would be hard to accomplish.”
The old man walking slowly into the room said this with a liveliness that didn’t match his appearance. Jircniv simply shifted his curious gaze.

“What is the matter, gramps?”

“I investigated, and discovered that it is impossible.”
“What do you mean?”

“... Your Imperial Majesty, magic has to follow the laws of this world too. Researching knowledge—”

“Ahh, I get it, I get it.” Jircniv waved his hands disinterestedly.

“Your lecture is too long, gramps. Instead, can you get straight to the point?”

“... If the man named Ainz Ooal Gown does really exist, and he possesses magic items or the ability to avoid detection, then we can presume that he is a mage of a similar or higher level than me.”

With the exception of the emperor and the old man, the tension in the room raised several notches.

To be on par with the highest tier magic caster in the history of the Empire, ‘Tri-arts’ Fluder Paradyne, they couldn’t believe their ears.

“I see now, is that why you are so happy, old man?”
“Of course. It has been more than two hundred years since I last saw an arcane magic caster who was my equal, or more powerful than me..”
“You met one two hundred years ago?”

The words driven by the curiosity of the Emperor threw the thoughts of the top court magician to the distant past.

“That'd be so. One of the thirteen heroes from the legends, necromancer Rigrit Bers Caurau, a great figure. She was probably the best of the thirteen heroes.”

“But right now, is gramps more powerful than she was as an arcane magic caster?
Fluder’s eyes seemed to be lost as if he was glancing into the distance.

“Well… I have already reached a higher plane than her… Though I

don’t have hard evidence. There are no right answers in the law of magic.”
In contrast to his movement of stroking his beard while speaking, his words were full of confidence. He then raised an eyebrow.

“Are you hoping that Ainz Ooal Gown has that kind of value?”

Jircniv smiled and chose a piece of paper from the few scattered on the couch, and stretched his hand over.

He felt baffled, but Fluder still caught and scanned the paper.

“Oh.”

That was the entirety of Fluder’s comment. But his sage-like appearance changed drastically. A fire burned brightly in his eyes, like those of a famished beast.

“I see, so that’s what this Ainz Ooal Gown, whom your Imperial Majesty is looking for, has done? This is really intriguing. They could probably hold their own against the special unit of the Theocracy with just the two of them… Hmm. I want to meet him and discuss about magic with him.”

On the paper was detailed what Gazef Stronoff said before the king, it even included the comments of the official taking down the minutes.

“Your Imperial Majesty, who did you dispatch to that village?”

“I didn’t go that far. It is too obvious to send people over.”

“...Send my disciple… No, if this report is true, we should try to build a cordial relationship if possible.”

“That’s the idea, gramps. If he is a man we can put under our control, I will welcome him to the Empire.”

“That will be for the best. In order to glimpse into the abyss of magic, all sorts of knowledge are needed. If possible, I would like to meet a pioneer.”

His voice was filled with desire.
Jircniv knew very well what Fluder desired.

Fluder wanted to peer into the abyss of magic. In order to do so, he wished to seek for a master who'd be more advanced than him.

As for the ones behind, they could take the road — which in most instances, was paved by Fluder — and travel through it.

By taking the path that suits you better in a more efficient manner, one could develop their own talent without any wastage.

However, this wasn’t permitted for Fluder who walked alone at the very front. As he had to tread in the dark, he wasted too much unnecessary effort in his studies. If he could develop his talent without any waste, Fluder would be an even more powerful magic caster.

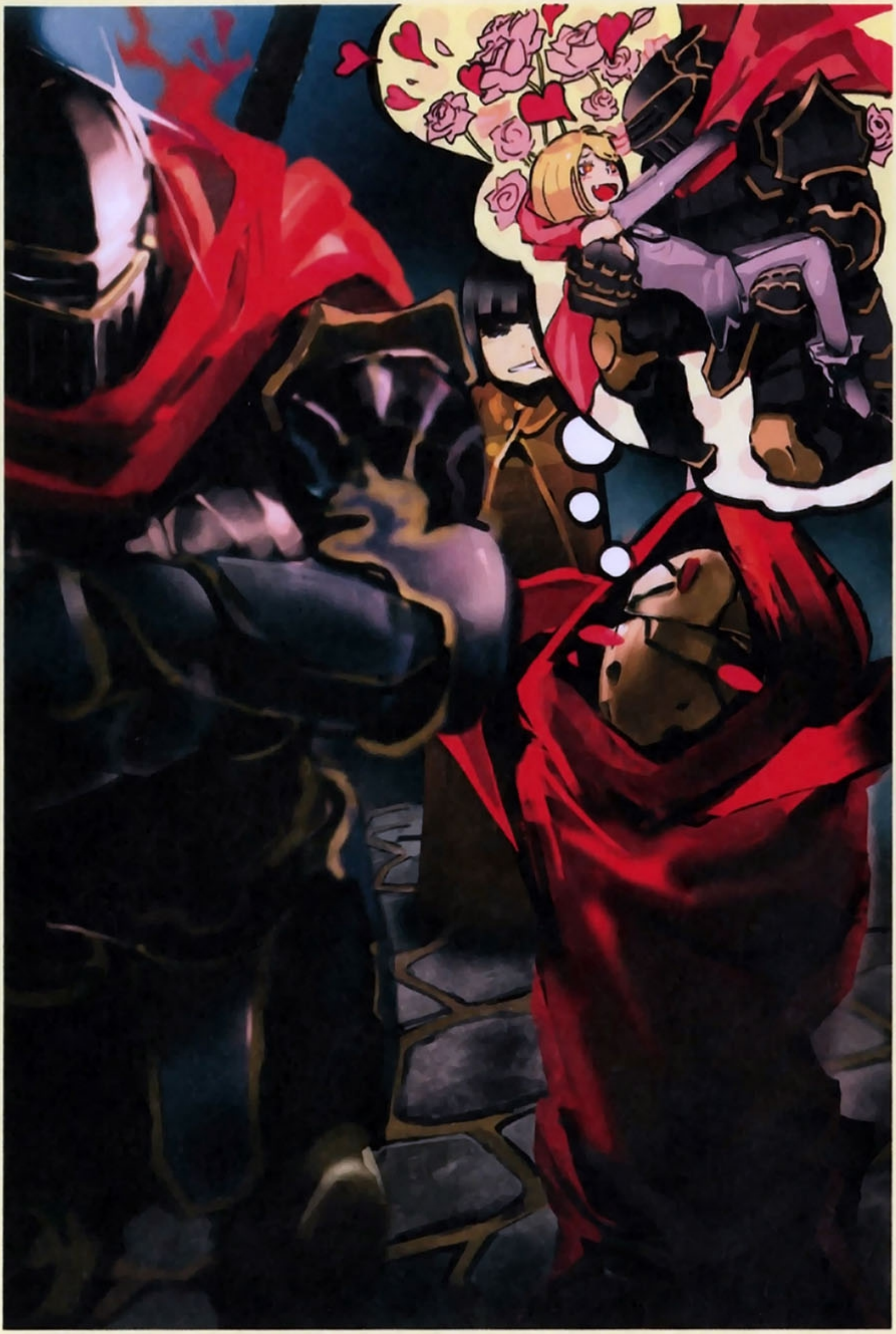
In order to do so, Fluder thirsted for someone who could guide him. There was a limit to one’s talent, he didn’t want to waste anymore effort.

Fluder nurtured his disciples in the hopes of finding someone who could surpass him, and then pull him ahead. Unfortunately, this has yet to happen.

This was the only wish Jircniv could never grant Fluder, so he changed the topic.
“Also, I want to collect information on the Adamantite adventurers that appeared in E-Rantel. Could you help me?”

“Of course, your Imperial Majesty.”

Chapter 10 - The Greatest Trump Card



10章 最強最高の切り札

Part 1

Month of Descending Fire, 4th Day, 22:31

High above the royal capital, a group of people flew like shooting stars through the night sky. Two of them were magic casters sustaining a flight spell, and the two others were their passengers.

One of the latter two, was a man in a suit of jet-black full plate armor, carrying two massive swords on his back, while the other was a ponytailed beauty. It went without saying that they were Ainz and Narberal.

That morning, the two of them had accepted a quest from the E-Rantel Adventurer's Guild for an unprecedented amount of money. The client was Marquis Raeven. On the surface, it appeared that the Marquis wished to hire adventurers to enhance his estate's security in the wake of the recent disturbances, whose causes were unknown.

Ainz knew that that wasn't the whole of the matter, and that he would find out more during the progress of the quest.

The reason was because they wanted to suppress the group known as the Eight Fingers, and they hoped Momon would fight alongside them, against the strongest members of the enemy, the Six Arms.

Ainz could not find any reason to reject this quest.

Normally, adventurers had an unspoken policy of staying out of national matters. In order not to drive off Ainz — or rather, Momon the Black — they had gone to the trouble of preparing a proper quest to serve as a cover, and aimed to attract him with a truly lavish reward.

After some thought, Ainz accepted the quest under a pretense of reluctance, in order not to make himself seem like a crass bargainer. The catch was that he had to make his way to the capital with all due haste.

In YGGDRASIL, there were waypoints that could be used to teleport from city to city, but in this new world, there were no such things. Teleportation magic was a 5th tier spell, which Momon and Nabe should not be able to use, and travelling overland by horseback would take an entire day.

What was to be done, then? The answer was simple, provided by the magic casters of Marquis Raeven.

They used accelerated flight spells in combination with the ‘Floating Board’ spell, and together they took Ainz and Nabe with them to the capital at great speeds. How did they do this? The answer was very simple. Ainz and Nabe sat on the floating disk, which reduced their effective weight, so carrying the two of them would not slow them down appreciably. In this way, they had rushed straight to the capital all day long until now. However, even with this trick, time was still very tight, and they had already fallen behind schedule. Because of this, Ainz was slightly worried. If he arrived and was told he was no longer needed, what reward, if any, could he collect?

Though Ainz had been drawn by the unprecedented reward, it was doubtful that the requester would be willing to pay out to someone who had done nothing.

Ainz sighed quietly. He sounded like he was praying, like an employee with a poor performance review hoping against hope for some kind of bonus.

No matter what, he had to earn this bounty. He had already decided how he would spend it.

As these thoughts ran through his head, Ainz saw the capital for the first time from the sky at night. He regretted that he could not take his time to enjoy the view. The capital was dark, and it didn't seem like a bustling city at all. Even so, it was a fascinating experience for Ainz, whose eyes could see clearly in the darkness.

Watching quietly from above, Ainz’ eyes spotted an interesting sight; a light in the distance.

Though nothing much happened at first, when he saw the rising black flames, he realised that this was an emergency situation.

"Wait! Look! There's a glow of spellcasting, over there!"

"Indeed... it does look like... some kind of magic..."

The magic caster that had followed the pointing of Ainz’ finger didn't seem to think much of it. A normal person would have had trouble making out the glow through the darkness and the distance, much less analyze it.

"What's wrong? Is this sort of thing commonplace in the capital? Or are these fireworks to welcome me?"

The magic caster didn't laugh at the joke. Indeed, the expression on his face was very serious.

"That was one of the eight locations we were supposed to attack—"

"I see. I thought we'd arrived too late, but it looks like we'll be doing some work after all."

"Understood, we will head towards that location."

"Stop. It looks like there's a pretty high-level magic caster present. If you're pulled into this, don't you think you might lose your life?"

Then what are we supposed to do? Ainz looked away from the magic caster's conflicted expression and turned to Narberal.

"Nabe, use ‘Fly’ and take me in closer to there. On my mark, drop me right on top of them."

"Certainly."

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire, 4th Day, 22:33

To Evileye, who was on the brink of life and death, the black warrior’s question seemed utterly ridiculous. However, she immediately changed her mind. When you thought about it, both of them seemed very suspicious. After all, it was a confrontation between two masked figures and it wasn't unthinkable that they might be seen as conspirators fighting among themselves.

Then, hoping that she'd correctly deduced the identity of the black warrior, Evileye cried out.

"Dark hero! I am Evileye of Blue Rose, and I appeal to you as a fellow adamantite ranked adventurer! Please, aid me!"

The moment she made her plea, Evileye realized that she had made a mistake.

That was the difference in the fighting strength between herself and the enemy. Even with the help of Momon the Black, a fellow adamantite ranked adventurer, what could they do? The demon facing

Evileye was one she could not hope to defeat, even with his help. It would be like going from a scrap of paper to two— either way, they would both be scattered by the raging storm before them.

If he accepted Evileye's request, she would be directly responsible for his death. What she should have done was to tell him to flee, and if possible, take the bodies of her comrades with him.

But—

"—I understand".

The man stood before the demon, hiding Evileye behind his back.

Evileye held her breath.

In the moment that he stood before her, she mistook him for a massive, sturdy wall, the kind that would defend a city. A sense of security and relief filled her to the depths of her heart.

And the demon confronting them actually bowed his head, as though he were a commoner showing due deference to a nobleman. It couldn't possibly be respect, he must have been mocking him. Was the demon merely playing games?

"My, my, such an honor you pay us this night. Might I inquire as to your noble name? This one is known as Jaldabaoth."

Jaldabaoth? She heard the surprised voice of the man underneath the jet-black helm, followed by the mumbled "weird name".

She didn't think it was weird. In fact, Evileye had no idea what to think of it. She knew quite a bit about the lore of demons and other infernal beings, but next to nothing about this name.

"Jaldabaoth, is it? I understand. My name is Momon, and like she said, I am an adamantite ranked adventurer."

Though bathed in Jaldabaoth's demoralizing presence, the warrior of darkness Momon carried on as though he hadn't noticed it at all.

So that's what he's doing, Evileye thought with approval. In order to draw his opponent out and learn from him, Momon exercised his iron discipline and kept his emotions from showing. It was clear why the man called Momon was recognized as a first-rate adventurer.

Evileye, who was ashamed of how easily her emotions had taken control of her, moved into the shadow of Momon's crimson cape in order not to distract the two of them from their exchange of words.

Even though Momon seemed willing enough to assist, she had the feeling that she would be getting in the way.

Momon and Jaldabaoth didn't bother acknowledging Evileye's presence. In the moment that she moved, they began a duel of wits, each seeking the secrets of the other.

"Ah, I see. May I then inquire as to the reason you have graced us with your presence this evening?"

"It's for a quest. A certain noble hired us to defend his estate... but when I passed by and saw this battle, I thought it was an emergency, and naturally I jumped in."

Said noble was Marquis Raeven, who had requested the presence of adamantite ranked adventurers in the capital, heedless to the risk of running afoul of the unwritten adventurer's policy of not getting involved in politics. One could tell he was desperately in need of the manpower to deal with the Eight Fingers.

"And what's your objective?"

"A mighty item capable of beckoning us to this plane has found its way to this city. We are here in order to retrieve it, of course."

"And what if we gave it to you? Wouldn't that solve the problem?"

"Unfortunately, that would be impossible. There can only ever be hostility between us."

"What kind of conclusion is that? De- Jaldabaoth, must we be enemies?"

"That is precisely so."

Evileye tilted her head at the surreal sight before her. Rather than a battle of wits, they were just sharing information. How did that even make sense?

"Well, I understand, for the most part. In that case... you do realize that I will defeat you here?"

Momon spread both his hands, and the greatswords which were like an extension of his arms seemed to shine.

"That... would be inconvenient. Do permit me to put up a bit of resistance."

"Then— here I come."

He stepped— no, that wasn't right. The Momon standing in front of her had vanished. He was engaged in an intense melee with Jaldabaoth.

It had developed into a struggle that Evileye could not describe with words.

The after-images of countless swords, parried and countered by the extended claws of Jaldabaoth.

"Incredible..."

There were many ways to render praise, but at this moment, Evileye, who was entranced by the dazzling swordplay before her, could only offer up that single word. It exceeded the blows of all the swordsmen in her memory. It seemed as though he would slice through the night and evil in one blow.

She felt like the princess in the songs of the bards. And the dark warrior before her seemed like a knight come to her rescue.

An electric current ran up her spine from between her legs, and Evileye's petite frame shuddered.

The heart of hers that had been still for over 150 years seemed to beat quickly once more.

Placing her hands on her breast, she found that of course there was no movement there. Even so, it felt real enough to her.

"...Please win, Momon-sama."

Evileye clasped her hands together in fervent prayer, hoping that her knight would triumph over the fearsome devil before her.

Whoosh! Jaldabaoth was blown a good distance away, with a sound that didn't seem like it could have come from a body of flesh and blood. Though he remained on his feet, he was still skidding over the cobblestoned floor at a rate that would swiftly wear out the soles of his shoes. After several dozen meters, he finally came to a halt, and dusted himself off.

"Truly spectacular. Crossing blows with a genius warrior like yourself might have been a mistake on my part."

With a great wham, Momon stabbed his sword deep into the stone beneath him, and used his free hand to pluck a chunk of stone from his head, before answering plainly.

"Enough with the pleasantries. You're hiding your power too, aren't you?"

It seemed almost unbelievable that neither party was going all-out despite the scope of this battle.

“Could he be a God-kin?”
The offspring of the beings known as "Players" were people who might awaken incredible power from within themselves. The Slane Theocracy called these people demigods. Or, more precisely, they were the ones who carried the bloodline of the Six Gods within their veins. If they had the blood of others, they would be termed differently.

It seemed very likely that this Momon was of the bloodline of a

“Player”. Or rather, it would be better to say that no human could have possessed such power.

"My my, it seems I couldn’t hide it from you after all. As expected of the one called Momon."

"Indeed, Jaldabaoth, my name is Momon after all."

"Very well, then. Here I come. 「Aspect of the Devil: Tentacle Wings」."

Wings sprouted from Jaldabaoth's back, but the feathers covering them were abnormally long, evoking the appearance of tentacles. He spoke evenly to Momon, who remained on his guard.

"You are strong. There is no doubt that your might exceeds my own. Though it is not exactly to my tastes, permit me the use of this method. While your own defense is formidable, can the same be said of the small fry behind you? How will you deal with that, then? Perhaps you should focus on defending her, no?"

With that, he cast forth a hail of feathers. Their tips were razor-sharp, capable of slicing cleanly through muscle and bone.

Evileye was defenseless in the face of this onslaught. She had no more mana to cast ‘Crystal Wall’. All she could do was wait and hope for a miracle.

But as it turned out, Evileye had been underestimating the dark warrior.

As the sound of metal rang out, Evileye looked up, and saw a stout shield standing before her.

The shattered remains of the feathers were scattered everywhere. Even though they were capable of shredding a human being to pieces, it was still a beautiful sight.

"It's good that you're all right."

That man's calm voice. His arm, swinging his sword at incredible speed. His breathing was measured and his tone was calm, even as he furiously deflected the feathers coming at them.

"Ah... ah... Ah! Your shoulder! Are you okay?"

Momon's pauldron had a feather stuck in it. Because it had been cloven in half mid-flight, it had lost its penetrating power. It looked like a decoration on his armor.

"That's nothing. Attacks of this level aren't even worthy of consideration. Rather, I am glad that you're all right."

He chuckled.

Evileye felt her heart lurch with a *badump*. Her face was hot under her mask, which felt like it was going to scald her.

"Marvellous! For defending her without letting her sustain so much as a scratch, I, Jaldabaoth, offer you my heartiest congratulations. Truly, a marvellous display."

"Like I said, enough with the pleasantries. Tell me, Jaldabaoth, why are you pulling away?"

With that, Momon scooped up Evileye in one arm and hugged her close to him.

"!"

Her unmoving heart felt like it was going to burst from her mouth. In her mind, the stupid stories of the stupid bards kept pounding through her brain, over and over again. Especially the ones where the knight carried the princess while doing battle. Any sensible person would realize that carrying a burden while fighting a strong enemy was nothing but foolishness.

But—

Evileye's heart fell. She imagined she was a princess being carried aloft, but the truth was...

"This is..."

She was being carried like a sack of potatoes under his arm. Although, that was actually the best way to do it. Compared to a mature adult woman, Evileye was small and light. In order to maintain his center of gravity, it made perfect sense for Momon to carry her like this.

She knew she had no grounds to complain, and her heart still burned with the anger of seeing her companions murdered. She knew full well this wasn't the time for such foolishness. Even so, there was no way to fully quell the unhappiness inside her heart.

Maybe if she had hugged him of her own accord, it might have made things easier for him. But she wasn't confident she could hang on to him by herself if he chose to fight at those breakneck speeds again, so she kept quiet.

Evileye once again watched the battle unfolding between Momon and Jaldabaoth. The distance between the two of them had widened further than before, but for the top-class warrior and the super-class demon, it seemed little more than an extra step for both of them.

"Then, shall we continue?"

"No, I believe that will be all for now. Like I said earlier, my objective is not to defeat you. Now, we will turn part of the capital into a purgatory. Once we have established the breach, rest assured that I shall certainly send you to the underworld atop a pyre of infernal flame."

With that, Jaldabaoth turned and vanished. His movements didn’t seem hurried, but in moments the distance between them had lengthened, and he faded into the night.

"No. No, this is not good, Momon-sama, if we don't pursue him—"

As Jaldabaoth vanished from sight, Evileye was starting to panic, but Momon shook his head.

"I can't do that. He was retreating in order to carry out his plan. If I pursued him, he would fight with his full power. And if he did that..."

Momon didn't have to finish the sentence for Evileye to understand.

If he gets serious, you'll get caught in his attacks and die. Something to that effect. But even if they stayed put, that despicable fiend would surely use attacks that would hit Evileye anyway.

The fact that Momon was defending Evileye proved that Evileye had value as a hostage.

She hated herself, who couldn’t assist Momon, who was protecting her, and the fact that she was nothing but a burden to him. To think she'd said such high-sounding things to Climb.

"Then, Nabe. What do you think we should do?"

In response, a woman descended slowly from the sky. The dark hero Momon's team included the magic caster known as the Beautiful Princess. At the time, Evileye had laughed at the vanity of such a nickname, but now, with the real person in front of her, she found herself holding her breath.

She was too beautiful. A foreigner... with looks like that, she must have come from the south. Evileye kept watching her, unable to look away.

"Momon-sa— san. Why don't we head to the residence of the nobleman who hired us, as originally planned?"

"Should we ignore Jaldabaoth? Isn't stopping that fellow's plans the whole reason why I'm here?"

"Perhaps, but we should still obtain the permission of the client. That seems most important."

"—That is true."

"In light of that, I suggest tossing that oversized mosquito aside."

"Hm? Ah, forgive me, I was worried you might have been hit by that attack just now."

Momon slowly lowered Evileye to the ground.

"No— please, don't mind me. I understood your intentions."

Evileye bowed deeply to Momon.

"Thank you very much for all your help. Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Evileye, of the adamantite ranked adventuring party Blue Rose."

"No need to be so formal, I am Momon, an adamantite-ranked adventurer like yourself. The magic caster here is my companion, Nabe. So what will you do after this? Are those two your companions? If you need someone to carry them for you, it shouldn't be a problem."

He pointed to Gagaran and Tia.

"I am deeply grateful for your offer, but there is no need. Our colleagues should be arriving soon. Perhaps they can cast the resurrection spell upon them here.

"Resurrection spells... you can use them?"

"Ah... ah, yes. Our team leader Lakyus can bring the dead back to life."

"Is that so? Then... if I may ask, from how far away can one cast a resurrection spell?"

"What do you mean?"

"That is to say, let’s say you wanted to resurrect these two. Assuming you cast your spell in the Empire, where would they resurrect? In the Empire, or where their bodies lie?"

Why? Why was he so interested in resurrection magic? Curiosity, perhaps. People who could use the 5th tier of divine magic were very rare, so it wasn’t unusual to be interested in this topic. Or perhaps someone important to him had died. In that case, Evileye’s reply would be cruel to him. She could only pray that was not the case.

“I’m not too clear on the details, but I heard Lakyus needs to be very close by in order to cast the resurrection spell. So, with regard to Momon-sama’s question, it would be impossible to cast the spell from the Empire.”

“Mmm. Then, another question; after resurrection, would the two of them be able to fight immediately?”

“It would be impossible,” Evileye replied.

The spell Lakyus cast was the 5th-tier magic ‘Raise Dead’. The raising would drain tremendous amounts of life force. Without exception, adventurers ranked iron and lower would be reduced to ash if it was cast on them. Adamantite ranked adventurers could be revived without a problem, but the resurrection would drain so much life energy from them that they would not be able to move, and recovering this life energy would take a long time.

If Jaldabaoth was right, not only were they still in danger, but they would also be deprived of a great amount of fighting strength.

...no, under these conditions, nobody can fight Jaldabaoth besides the great man in front of me. Resurrecting the two of them would do nothing to alter the circumstances. It would be wiser for them to focus on recovery after their revival.

“I see… I think I have the general idea now. If possible, I think I would like to meet Lady Lakyus. Would it be possible for me to wait here with you?”

"Wha! W-w-w-why do you want to see Lakyus?!"

Before she could recover her composure, Evileye’s words had already left her mouth. She didn't understand the reason why herself. In the instant she heard Momon saying that he wanted to see Lakyus, her heart was filled with resentment. It even shocked herself, and her outburst had alarmed Momon too.

Within her mask, her face began reddening with shame, and she was glad that the cloak covered up the tips of her ears which were also turning red.

"I... I was hoping to ask about revival magic, and also to meet with the leader of Blue Rose, who are fellow adventurers of the same rank as myself, and who are my seniors besides. That, and Jaldabaoth might be gone, but there's no guarantee he will not return. Is that so displeasing?"

"N-no, it's not like that... ah, I'm sorry I shouted at you."

The resentment in her chest vanished the moment she heard Jaldabaoth's name; she knew they had to be on guard against him.

Thinking carefully on what had already been said... I should have seen that coming. As for looking out for Jaldabaoth's return... That implies he wants to protect me? Fufu...

"Then, while we wait, do you mind if I ask about what happened before?"

"Before that, I need to take care of my comrades' bodies. I can't just leave them here. There's no problem with moving them, is there?"

Of course there was no problem. With that, Evileye went over to the bodies.

She'd thought they would have been burned beyond recognition, but it seemed that the devil's flames had only burned the soul rather than the flesh. The corpses were immaculate. After closing their eyes and crossing their arms over their chests, Evileye withdrew a ‘Shroud of Sleep’ from her pack, and began wrapping Tia up in it.

"What is this?"

"This is a magic item that stops the decay and rigor mortis of a body when wrapped around it. It's very useful for those who use resurrection spells."

While this was so, Momon noticed during Evileye's reply that she was struggling to wrap up Gagaran's bulky frame, so he decided to lend a hand by lifting up her body with his incredible arm strength. When the bodies were wrapped up, Evileye solemnly clasped her palms together, praying for the souls of the dead and for Lakyus to revive them.

"Thank you for your help."

"Think nothing of it. As I was asking earlier, could you tell me what exactly happened here?"

Evileye nodded, and began recounting the events that had come to pass. What she knew, what they'd planned to do, and the story of their encounter with the insect maid and the battle where Jaldabaoth had made his entrance.

As she spoke of how she had nearly finished off the insect maid, a change came over Momon and Nabe, who had been quietly listening to her story up until now.

"Then, did you kill her?"

His words were neutral, but the anger behind them was unmistakable.

Evileye was alarmed. Why would he be upset about killing Jaldabaoth’s maid? But she decided to finish telling the story.

"No, we didn't kill her. Jaldabaoth appeared before we could do that.”

"...Is that so? I see, I see."

The anger vanished, and Evileye wondered if he had even been angry in the first place. But, the silent Nabe's hard eyes were still filled with simmering wrath. It was difficult to tell if she disdained everyone in this way.

Momon coughed, and asked, "Then... if you hadn't tried to kill the insect maid, do you think Jaldabaoth would have attacked you?"

Evileye instantly realized why Momon had been angry. The insect maid had been neutral, and for all she knew, the two of them attacking her might have been the trigger for the current events.

It was only natural for adventurers to avoid unnecessary battles. If a group of high level adventurers didn't know this, it would disgrace the name of adamantite-ranked adventurers, and even Momon himself. That should be the reason why he was upset. Even so, Evileye couldn't fully agree with that line of reasoning.

"Jaldabaoth said that he would turn the capital into an inferno. A maid following someone like that couldn't possibly be a normal person. I believe the decision my colleagues made to fight her was the correct course of action."

That was the one thing she couldn't compromise on. That maid had been stronger than Gagaran and Tia. Knowing this, they had still fought on— there had to be a reason for that. She had to believe that her comrades had had a good reason for what they did.

The defensive Evileye and the silent Momon looked at each other, as though peering through her mask and his helmet. Although neither could see each other's face, Evileye was certain that she was staring into Momon's eyes.

In the end, Momon was the first to give in.

"Mmm. Ah. I see. You were right. I apologize."

He lowered his head to her. That shocked Evileye. Even though her belief in her comrades was firm, she still couldn't make her savior humble himself like that.

"Ah! Please, raise your head! Such a wonderful person like you should... Ueeeeee?"

As she realised what she had just said, Evileye let out a pathetic yelp.

While it was true that Momon was an outstanding individual, when you thought about it, using the word "wonderful" to describe him was...

Evileye squealed in her heart.

Aaaaah! I can't help it, he's too damn cool! Is it wrong for me to feel like a girl again, just once in hundreds of years? After all, he's a mighty warrior who's stronger than me...

Given the way Evileye was looking at Momon like a lovestruck schoolgirl, if he felt embarrassed and said so, that meant she still had a chance. If not, her chances would be miniscule.

Evileye's body had stopped developing at the age of twelve. As such, she possessed none of the parts that men wanted to see. Whether it came to inducing the fires of lust in others, or satisfying said lust, it would have been very difficult for her. Of course, a certain subset of men would have been very attracted to her, but they were a minority. With a beauty like Nabe nearby, her chances seemed even slimmer.

As Evileye gathered her courage to look at him, she found that Momon and Nabe were looking at the night sky instead.

She didn't quite know what they were doing at first, but when she remembered how she had wailed just now, it came to her. The two of them had taken her cry as a warning.

No, it's not~

With nothing to say, the feeling drove her to the brink of tears.

"...maybe you were mistaken? There's nothing there," Momon said as he scanned the surrounding sky.

"M-mistake, it was a mistake. I'm truly sorry."

"Ah, think nothing of it. It's better to be mistaken than ambushed."

Nabe returned her sword to her back, as Momon replied to Evileye with one sword in hand.

His gentleness left Evileye speechless. In that moment, the edge of her vision lit up. The color wasn't the pure white of magic, but a malevolent red, the color of a roaring blaze.

"Momon-san, look over there."

As Nabe said this, the two of them turned to look at the crimson radiance. Evileye's eyes widened, for she knew what had caused the fire.

"What? That's..."

The crimson fire spat tongues of flame toward the sky, as though it aimed to burn down the heavens. It was easily more than thirty meters high, and she could hardly imagine how wide it was— several hundred meters, maybe more.

The wall of flame swayed like a veil, and encircled the city like a girdle.

Evileye, who had been shocked senseless by the sight, heard a soft male voice in her ear.

"‘Flames of Gehenna’?"

As though her neck was on springs, she snapped her head to the side to face Momon.

"That, that, what, what is that? Momon, do you know what that huge wall of flame is?"

Momon's shoulders trembled slightly as he replied, with an uncharacteristic lack of confidence.

"Eh? Ah... no, no, I can't be very sure about that. Can I tell you again after I confirm the details?"

"That... that's all right..."

"I need to discuss something with Nabe, please excuse us."

"Eh, can't I come along too?"

"Ah, no, it's a personal thing. Please, excuse us."

It was so basic, so obvious that Evileye felt ashamed for even asking in the first place. Her wandering eyes settled on the woman known as the Beautiful Princess.

On her face was a triumphant smile.

She might have been mistaken, but then again, she might not. It was only natural for a woman to feel superior to all other women when a great man paid special attention to her.

Evileye was unable to suppress the strange feeling boiling up inside her. It was an anger that disgusted her; the flames of jealousy.

He's not just strong, he also knows things even I don't... I won't ever meet a *man like him again.*

Human females were naturally attracted to the strong. When threatened by a powerful outside force, it triggered their natural instinct to join with a strong male and bear his children, receiving protection for herself and her offspring. Of course, not all women would select a man in this manner. Personality, looks, many factors could lead to love. Even so, there was a very strong inclination to look for strength in a partner.

Evileye looked down on such women.

It's foolish to want to be protected because you're weak. Instead, all you need to do is become strong, and you won't need anyone to protect you. That should be the way.

But if she let a man like this go, would she ever meet anyone else who could satisfy her so completely like he could?

Evileye would not age, but Momon would surely grow old and die before her. And no matter how hard she tried, Evileye would never be able to bear Momon's children. Decades later, she would be lonely again. Still, she thought it might be good to live as a woman for once in her life.

Another woman can have the child. The most important thing is love. I certainly won't begrudge him a mistress or two.

"Then, please wait here for a while. I apologize for... Evileye?"

"Hm? Ahh, I'm sorry. I was thinking about something myself, things to discuss with my party. I'll wait here, then."

Truth to be told, she didn't want to part with him. But she also didn't want to hang around the woman to whom she had wholeheartedly admitted defeat.

Of course, she couldn't say such a thing.

Nobody wanted a woman who was too clingy. Men were creatures who wanted to flee the more you tried to tie them down.

She recalled the idle chatter in the tavern. At that time, she'd laughed it off, because she had thought it had nothing to do with her.

What a waste. Even trivia like that had its uses. I should have listened closely... but would it be too late to start now? Will I have time to learn how to be a woman?

As she watched the receding shapes of the two adventurers, Evileye's head started filling with wild thoughts.

She knew now wasn't the time for idle fantasies, but she knew too little about what was going on, let alone how to proceed, and so she didn't do anything. Even so, Evileye would be going into a battle in which she might perish. In that event, she might as well sigh and earnestly consider something else to prevent her dwelling on it.

...it's a fact.

She didn't know what her body was good for, if it couldn't bear children, but it was an avenue that was still worth thinking about.

...haaa. Defeating Jaldabaoth and making a future...

The blaze in Evileye's heart roared up, as though challenging Jaldabaoth within the wall of fire.

The only one who can beat you is Momon-sama. Then, I will dispose of the trash around you. This time, if the maid shows herself, I will kill her. I was once the cursed being known as Landfall! Don't look down on me, Jaldabaoth!

◆◆◆

"I don't think she'll be able to hear us here."

"It would be very difficult to listen in on us from so far away."

"Even so, we should still be prepared."

Ainz activated a cash item. It had the power to prevent eavesdropping, but it felt like a waste because it was a one-use item.

However, he had no choice.

"Then, Nabe, I think I've seen through Demiurge's plan for the most part. However, the more complex the machine, the more easily it breaks down. The same applies to schemes. We must avoid acting like we've won and not confirming the facts just because we seem to have the upper hand. Do you understand?"

"I see... as expected of our lord and master, a peerless existence."

Narberal's praise came from the bottom of her heart, and Ainz acknowledged it with a regal nod of his head. It was as though he were saying that everything was going according to plan.

This was not the case.

He felt as though he was going to drown in the lake that his non-existent cold sweat was forming.

He couldn't even grasp the meaning behind Demiurge's scheme. Ainz had simply gone into the battle with the foolish notion of showing off his battle skills in a stylish display at the capital.

The shock of learning that his opponent was Demiurge had shattered his composure utterly. Only the emotion control override possessed by all undead had kept him calm.

After that he thought he would just be fighting the Eight Fingers just going by his orders, but then he learned that he would be doing battle with adamantite-ranked adventurers. Because he didn't know what was going on at all, Ainz had nearly given up on thinking things through.

Speaking thoughtlessly under these conditions would sound entirely unnatural. Ainz knew that it was extremely dangerous to pretend understanding when one was actually ignorant. Perhaps it might have been wiser to reveal his lack of knowledge, but under the circumstances, it was ill-advised. A Supreme Being worthy of loyalty would have to demonstrate a fitting amount of foreknowledge.

If a superior — especially one of a CEO's level — proved himself to be too incompetent, his subordinates would lose their trust in him.

Therefore, he had frantically racked his non-existent brain cells to produce the aphorism he had just spouted.

Perhaps Narberal was too honest, or the words he spoke had been unexpectedly meaningful. Narberal's eyes were filled with respect. As such, Ainz made a request of her under the pretense of ordering her.

"Mmm. Then, in order to ensure the success of Demiurge's operation, make contact with him. I will not do it personally because that woman might still be watching. And right now, I cannot use magic. Hu... that Evileye hadn't let her guard down for a single moment. I don't have proof, but I'm sure she's already suspecting me.”

"How could that be? There's no such thing. Perhaps there's another reason she's looking so closely at you."

Ainz looked at Narberal while trying not to make it obvious that he was staring at her.

"That has to be the reason. I roughly understand how that woman thinks. I believe revealing my anger when we discussed Entoma was a fatal mistake. Perhaps I should have just killed her off back then?"

There was no answer to give.

When he had heard Entoma had nearly been killed, Ainz’s anger had flared up. Although it had been suppressed in an instant like all intense emotions, in that instant that he had been filled with murderous rage. It was a miracle that he hadn't promptly chopped off Evileye's head with his sword.

He had suppressed his killing intent and not acted on his anger because earlier, he had concluded that killing Evileye would have been counterproductive. At long last he had found an introduction to someone who could use resurrection magic— and they were in a position to benefit from it. Ruining this would be too much of a waste.

Perhaps I've grown, and learned to control myself.

If it wasn't because of Shalltear's brainwashing, it's possible that he would have ignored the potential gains to Nazarick and killed Evileye. The Great Tomb of Nazarick and the NPCs created by his former friends were treasures that Ainz wanted to protect. He would not forgive any attempt to harm them, but he also had to consider what was most important and which choices to make to attain it. That was maturity.

Ainz reflected that his capacity had grown to match his experience, and the illusion of the face underneath his helmet smiled to itself.

At this rate, there’s no doubt that he would be able to become a true ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Or rather, he hoped to reach that stage.

Before that, I have to avoid disappointing people or suffering great setbacks… it’ll be very hard on me…

“Is that so? As expected of Ainz-sama, you completely saw through that woman. Such vision could only belong to one destined for the throne.”

“Enough with the pleasantries, Narberal. More accurately, it was my mistake which led to her suspicion.”

Ainz waved Narberal off in a gesture that also hid his embarrassment. Then, in a steely voice, he issued his command.

“Let’s go, Narberal. Go and discover all the details of this scheme, and then tell me about them. Also, tell Albedo that if this drags on, we will have to join in clearing up Jaldabaoth’s mess.”

Narberal bowed and cast a spell.

Inside his heart, Ainz rejoiced. He had not lied to Narberal. Ainz’ current state as a Perfect Warrior meant that he could not use magic. Thus, using Narberal to relay messages from Demiurge was only logical. But there was another reason, one that he could not say out loud.

In order to better pretend that he had already seen through Demiurge's plans, and not let Albedo and Demiurge suspect anything, he had to minimize contact with them.

If he assigned Narberal to do it, it would be like playing a game of telephone, and some of the information might end up distorted. However, he would rather take that gamble than risk damaging his image as the supreme ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Ainz slowly made his way back to Evileye.

While Narberal was talking to Demiurge, it would be up to him to draw her attention.

"Really now... it'd be good if we could somehow get through this.

Speaking of which, I wonder what the face of a child with such power looks like under the mask...”

Part 2

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month) 5th Day 00:47

Though it was in the middle of the night, a corner of the royal city was lit up by torches as though it were broad daylight. A somewhat cramped room was packed full of men and women. They were all dressed in battle gear, but there was no unifying theme among them.

They were all adventurers within the capital who had responded to the hasty summons of the palace. Orichalcum and mithril-ranked adventurers notwithstanding, even lowly iron and copper-ranked adventurers were present for this.

The more senior adventurers had already realized that the reason outsiders like themselves had been permitted into the palace was in order to take care of the problems plaguing the capital. Some of these adventurers had already begun guessing at their employer upon seeing the youth in white armor standing at attention in the corner. Even fewer of these adventurers had any idea of the true identity of the katana-bearing man who stood beside the youth.

The great door to the chamber suddenly opened, and what appeared was a band of women, causing a stir.

Every one of them was known to the adventurers within the Kingdom.

At their head was the leader of the adamantite ranked adventuring party "Blue Rose", Lakyus Alvein dale Aindra.

Close behind her was the Golden Princess Renner, along with the leader of the Adventurer's Guild in the capital. Then there was Evileye of Blue Rose and one of the twins. And at the back was the strongest warrior of the Kingdom, Gazef Stronoff.

As the group stood before the gathered adventurers, the youth in white armor unrolled the scroll in his hands, and pasted it onto the wall behind him.

It was a detailed map of the royal capital.

The first to speak was a woman in her forties, a former member of a mithril ranked adventuring party whose eyes were still filled with vitality.

"Ladies and gentlemen, to begin with, I'd like to thank you for being able to be present for this emergency meeting."

After the room had quietened down, she continued to address the adventurers with an earnest expression on her face.

"Normally, the Adventurer's Guild would never interfere in national affairs."

Every eye turned to the members of Blue Rose, but they remained silent. After all, eyes could not speak like the mouth could.

"However, this is an exceptional case. The Adventurer's Guild has decided to cooperate fully with the Kingdom, in order to quickly resolve the problems facing us. The princess will relate the details to us, so I pray you will be quiet and listen."

The Princess slowly advanced, flanked by the members of Blue Rose and Gazef Stronoff.

"I am Renner Theiere Chardelon ryle Vaiself, and I am deeply grateful that everyone here was able to respond to the extraordinary summons issued tonight."

She bowed demurely to them, and several sighs of affection rose from the adventurers as they saw the delicate sight before them.

"Normally, I would render duly deserved praise upon all of you, but as time is of the essence, let us arrive presently to the point. This night, a portion of the capital—"

Here the princess raised a finger to a part of the map —the northeast corner— and drew a circle around it.

"—a portion of the capital was surrounded by a wall of fire. The flames are more than thirty meters in height, and I am certain you have all seen them."

Most of the adventurers nodded in agreement, while some went to the palace windows to look outside. The high walls surrounding the palace meant that they couldn't see the wall of fire directly, but the reflected light from the flames stained the sky red, and that they could see.

"This flame ought to be an illusion of some sort, because touching it does not cause harm. According to those who have contacted it, the fire does not have heat, or impede movement. Moving past the firewall should not pose a problem either."

At this, the lower-ranked adventurers breathed sighs of relief.

"The perpetrator of this incident is known as Jaldabaoth, a powerful demon. Blue Rose has already confirmed that there are low-ranking demons on the other side of the firewall. They seem to be acting entirely on orders from their superiors."

Lakyus nodded to Renner as she said that.

"...strike at the head and the body will die... does that mean all we have to do is defeat Jaldabaoth?"

Renner turned to acknowledge the speaker, an adventurer with a mithril plate upon his neck.

"That might be an oversimplification, but fundamentally, that is true.

However, what I wish to ask of all of you is to defeat this devil's plot. We have information that suggests that he is here to seize a certain magic item which is on its way to the capital."

That news sparked a disturbance among the adventurers. They had finally realized that the region encircled by the firewall included the warehouses and shophouses that made up the capital's economic heart.

"...how did you come by this information?"

"It was stated by Jaldabaoth himself."

"Then don't you think there's a high chance this information could be false?"

"Certainly, it is not out of the question. However, I believe it to be accurate. The enemy has not made any movements ever since they set up the wall of fire. More importantly, if what Jaldabaoth says is true, then inaction will mean that all we can do is watch the worst-case scenario unfolding before our eyes. Therefore, we must seize the initiative."

"How strong is that Jaldabaoth you mentioned? I don't remember hearing or reading about him. It would help us if you could tell us his difficulty level."

Lakyus stepped forward with a stern expression on her face.

"My colleague Evileye is the one who is most familiar with Jaldabaoth's strength, but we do not know the specifics yet. We will update you later."

Difficulty ranking was how adventurers rated the monsters they encountered. The higher the number, the stronger the opponent. However, it was an unspoken rule that one should not rely too heavily on difficulty rankings, because it would lead to nasty surprises. The strength of monsters varied even within their own species and at best, a difficulty ranking was an educated guess. Thus, it was not a value that was frequently used. However, it was a simple way to explain things to a group like this.

"I shall speak of what I know as my group's representative. My comrades encountered an insect maid —believed to be one of Jaldabaoth's followers— and defeated her, only for Jaldabaoth to appear and engage us in battle..."

The absence of Gagaran the warrior and Tia the rogue had already been noticed by the adventurers present. Lakyus looked around at the adventurers in the room.

"They were killed by Jaldabaoth."

"With a single blow."

Chaos broke out with Evileye's statement. Adamantite-ranked adventurers, the pinnacle of humanity, living legends. It was unthinkable that they could be killed, let alone in a single blow.

"Do not be afraid!"

Evileye shouted as though she would disperse the fear in the air with her voice.

"Certainly, Jaldabaoth is powerful. I can vouch for this, having faced him with nothing to show for it but defeat. That is a monster that no ordinary human can defeat. Even if every person here gathered to fight him, we would simply be defeated as a group. But there is no need to worry. There is a man who can do battle evenly with Jaldabaoth!"

Amidst the commotion, some of the brighter adventurers looked to a certain place— to a certain adventurer.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I believe you know this man. From the third adamantite ranked adventuring team that was recently founded in E-Rantel of the Kingdom— indeed, it is him—"

Evileye pointed her finger at the pair of adventurers, and the eyes of the entire room went with her.

"The leader of Darkness, the Dark Hero Momon-dono!"

One was encased in night-black plate armor and wearing a helmet that he refused to remove even indoors, while the other was a world-class beauty. The two of them instantly became the center of everyone's attention. Exclamations of awe and wonder filled the room as they realised the celebrities they had in their midst.

Momon shifted his adamantite plate from within the folds of his crimson cape to where everyone could see it.

"Quickly, Momon-san, please come to the front of the room."

In contrast to Evileye's excitement, Momon simply raised a hand in reply, and whispered a few words in Narberal's ear.

"Momon-san says there is no need for a lengthy introduction. We should begin the briefing quickly."

"Well, that is a shame. Then, let us make haste, as Momon-sama suggests. Evileye, may I continue the briefing?"

"Cough, uh, apologies, Princess Renner, please, continue."

Even though her mask concealed her face, one could tell how Evileye felt from the disappointed tone of her voice.

"As Evileye said, we have a warrior who can stand against Jaldabaoth. Everyone, please rest assured that we are not picking a fight we cannot win. Then, I shall explain the details of the operation."

Renner sketched a line on the map.

"To begin with, I would like you to act as our bow."

"A bow?" came a doubtful voice, "Not a shield?"

"A shield will not help us win. To begin with, I wish to form the adventurers up into a battle line, followed closely by a line of guards. Behind them will be the support line of priests and magic casters. In this way, we will advance into the enemy stronghold. At this point, if the enemy does not engage us, then we will have the adventurers advance into the enemy headquarters and suppress the area. If we are attacked, we will first determine if we can repel the attack. If possible, we will advance. If not, then I must ask the adventurers to retreat while drawing off the enemy. In the meantime, I must ask the guards to hold off the enemy as long as possible. If the adventurers must retreat, then they must head here."

She pointed to the support line of the magic casters.

"You will heal here, and from there we will see about mounting another attack."

"Hang on! Does this mean... the guards will be fighting on our behalf?"

The guards had very low fighting strength. It seemed impossible for any amount of them to substitute for an adventurer in combat.

Just as Renner was about to reply, another adventurer spoke up.

"Another thing, there's a fatal flaw in this plan. While retreating, our formation will stretch out, and our defensive power will weaken as a result. What if the demons attack the capital in the meantime? Even a low-ranking demon is far more powerful than an average human. Won't there be a lot of needless sacrifices? Instead, why don't we use ‘Fly’ to penetrate the enemy formation in one movement?"

"I have considered this method as well, but is it not true that demons count many flyers among their numbers?"

The gathered adventurers recalled tales of flying demons and nodded to Renner. Even low-ranking demons had wings, and many could fly.

"The usual application of ‘Fly’ will only serve to draw the eyes of the enemy to ourselves. I had considered starting at a high altitude, then suddenly plunging to the ground and using the buildings of the city to block the enemy's vision while we assaulted them at high speed from cover... but there is another matter to discuss before this. You mentioned earlier that when retreating, the battle lines would spread, and the defense would weaken. The same applies to our enemy. So for this battle, we are not a shield, but a bow."

Shouts of approval came up from the adventurers.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you will be the bow of our Kingdom, drawn and loosed, to pierce our foe straight through the heart. Just as the adventurers will spread out, so will the enemy as they follow us. This also means the enemy's defense will weaken. Between a relaxed and a closed formation, I am certain it is easier to break through a relaxed formation. The purpose for forming you up into a line like this is to lure the enemy into weakening themselves. And finally, acting as the arrow will be Momon-sama here. When he sees the enemy lines open up, he will make a low-altitude flying assault to break through them."

"...how about Red Drop? Even if they are adamantite ranked adventurers, I don't see how two people can break through by themselves. To be safe, don't we need someone to screen them before they reach Jaldabaoth?"

"At the moment, they are performing a task within the Republic. We have already used ‘Message’ to inform them of the situation, but returning will still them take half a day. By that time, it would be too late. So this time round, we are not counting their strength into our plans."

"Then how about Blue Rose? Will they be going in with Momon-san?"

"...Our battle strength has been greatly depleted with the loss of two of our members. Tina and I will join the battle line and fight. Evileye will be doing something else."

"...I will be accompanying Momon-sama... Momon-san as he makes his entry, so I have been focusing on restoring my mana up until now."

"Then let me ask another question. I'd like to ask the Warrior Captain something. What about the nobles' house troops and warriors? Blue Rose has already lost two members. You should be taking their place in battle. Couldn't you lead those troops into battle, and let Blue Rose handle the task of clearing the path for Momon-san?"

"Answer us!"

"The house troops are responsible for protecting their masters' estates, and the soldiers look to the defense of the capital. And the warriors I lead are tasked with defending the royal family."

"So you're saying the great Gazef Stronoff doesn't dare set foot on the battlefield?"

"Indeed, that is so. My duty is to stay in the capital and protect the members of the royal family."

The air had changed. It was filled with hostility and frustration. Gazef's words were correct, but even if they understood them on a logical level, it was still unacceptable on an emotional level. The ones who earned their coin in blood were the adventurers, and they were already prepared to sell their lives dearly in the coming battle. The nobles and royalty should have been the same way. Having taken the money of the masses, they should be rushing to their rescue instead of holing up safe in their castles. Especially since they were taking the Kingdom's strongest man as their bodyguard. What the hell?

Hostility against the nobles and the royalty filled the air. Gazef took a step back. He understood that at this point, anything he said would only sound like an excuse.

Therefore, the one who spoke for him was Lakyus.

"Everyone, I understand you are not happy with his arrangement. But before that, I would advise you to keep one thing in mind. The one paying to gather you all here is not the royal family, but Princess Renner herself, out of her own private finances. The one who brought Momon-san here was Marquis Raeven. He is not here tonight because he is on guard against any demons which might be dispersed in the capital. Certainly, I am as unhappy with the nobles and royals as you are, but I would like you to consider that not all of them are cut from the same cloth."

The room calmed down somewhat as Lakyus finished her piece. Everyone was trying to control the anger they didn't want to show to Renner.

"...and there is one more thing. Before we fire the arrow, we must perform one more task. Climb!"

"Yes, Princess!"

His energetic voice drew everyone's attention to the boy in the white armor.

"Although it is a very dangerous task, I must still entrust you with it. When we enter the enemy stronghold, there might be survivors. Please rescue them."

Murmured whispers rose up from the adventurers. "Impossible", "it's too much", that sort of thing. Entering the heart of the enemy formation and looking for survivors wasn't so much dangerous as outright suicidal. And escorting powerless civilians back out through a war zone was practically impossible.

Still, Climb answered immediately.

"Yes, your majesty! I will stake my life to accomplish any task you ask of me!"

Everyone looked at Climb as though he were mad.

"...Princess, Climb is just one man, and there might be some risk. Will you permit me to accompany him?"

"Will that be all right, Brain Unglaus-sama?"

That name raised another commotion from the adventurers. The name of Brain Unglaus was one which nobody who valued strength would ever forget.

"Ah, it's no problem for me."

"Then I will be count on you. May I now ask the various party leaders to step forward?"

As he watched the adventurers at the head of the room, Ainz was doing some work of his own.

That is to say, he was making introductions.

People who looked like they were second-in-command for their adventuring parties were coming up to Ainz in twos and threes to speak to him.

Their lines followed similar patterns from announcing their party names, admiring his equipment, hoping to meet him again and sharing stories of their adventures. It was similar to how one might exchange business cards at work, but while business cards had physical forms, verbal introductions would only linger as memories.

A good memory was an important skill for a leader. Ainz let his mind wander as he committed every person he met to memory.

The important thing was to remember the party name and what rank they were. And of course, he would only pay attention to the higher-ranking adventurers. Iron and copper-ranked adventurers came to greet him too, but they lived in different worlds, and so forgetting them was not an issue. It was like how a department head would not bother remembering the salarymen of a small company he visited.

Even so, Momon didn't make it obvious that he was taking them lightly. He shook hands with all comers, gave them reassuring pats on the shoulder, laughed at their stupid jokes, and returned the praise he received.

Someone had even taken their gloves off to shake hands with him, with him in gauntlets and all. It must be a matter of rank, Momon thought as he looked at the back of the person who had just said hello.

What a crazy color...

His hair was a shocking pink.

It wasn't uncommon for adventurers to paint their gear in garish colors, but this was the first time he had seen someone dye their hair in such a lurid shade.

Adventurers in the capital really were a different thing altogether. Just because there were so many people in the capital, that didn't mean you had to go so far just to stand out.

Well, it doesn't seem like there's any taboos or stigma associated with dying *your hair...*

During Ainz’ life as a salaryman, pink hair would have been considered strange, but in this world, even kids could dye their hair.

He forced himself to depart the topic of hair, and instead looked at the line of adventurers in front of him. It reminded him of the queuing instinct of the Japanese. Then, he turned his focus to Narberal who stood behind him.

Ainz had never once registered a party name, but the party called Darkness had one more member, the slim beauty who now stood behind him.

The massed adventurers did not dare speak to her because the sheer hostility which she radiated was prickling their skin. That, and they had come to meet and greet Ainz, which would be more beneficial to them.

In the end, adventuring society is just like working life...

After all, they were all social constructs of humanity. It only made sense that there would be similarities between them.

Around the time where Ainz’ hand would have started getting sore from shaking if he had been a human, the stream of adventurers approaching began dwindling down. Sensing an opportunity, Evileye approached, cutting in front of the person who was going to shake

Ainz’ hand. They couldn't complain, though. The adventurers had made their introductions in order of rank, from highest to lowest. Being at the tail end of the line, the ones remaining were the novices, and they certainly couldn't say anything against the adamantite-ranked Evileye.

"The introductions should be pretty much over, could you come over here for a bit?"

Ainz glanced at her through the slit of his closed helm, and then he spied Gazef from the corner of his vision. If he was still there, that could only mean one thing.

"Nabe, take my place and meet them. I'll come over after I finish up here."

The nearby listeners' eyes went wide.

"I'm very sorry, but the ones who queued up came first."

Ainz turned from Evileye and continued speaking the adventurers who had come to see him.

If Ainz were speaking to the boss of a small company and was called over by the boss of an international corporation, he would naturally go over to the latter. It wasn't favoritism or discrimination, but rather, common sense. If he stuck to his guns and ignored the call, he would be seen as a selfish leader who couldn't see the big picture. As a salaryman, sometimes you had to put aside your own thinking and act for the greater benefit of the company.

That was what it meant to be a cog in a machine.

However, this time was different.

I shouldn't speak to Gazef. Even if it's just for a moment, and even if it's been two months ago so he shouldn't remember... if he does, I'll be trapped. But there's no getting around it. Although I feel uneasy, I should probably let Nabe take it on first, and then lower my voice a little before speaking to him.

...I've been speaking for quite a while, so if he hasn't heard it by now he probably never will. Still, I'd better be careful.

"Quick, Nabe. Go over to them."

"Understood."

Taking his eyes off Nabe, who was walking over to the princess, Ainz took his helmet off as well. He felt the eyes of the entire room focusing on him. He cricked his neck, and then put the helmet back on. Originally, he'd planned to spice up the act by wiping his sweat off, but Ainz’ “face” was an illusion, and if he didn't do it right, his hand would end up passing through it instead. So, he decided to end it with the neck-crick instead.

That was the plan, to satisfy Gazef's curiosity by letting him see Momon's face.

Hopefully after Narberal goes over, they'll forget about coming over to talk to me...

Ainz prayed so in his heart while he turned back to the adventurers who were seeking him.

"What a surprise, are you used to this already?"

It was Evileye's voice. She was still hanging around. Why couldn't she have been a good girl and gone over with Narberal? Of course, he didn't reveal his irritation. In fact, to avoid suspicion, he replied to her in a gentle voice.

"Oh, it wasn't anything special."

This was nothing for anyone who had worked in a company before.

"Hardly. I think it's the best attitude to have for leading a party."

How annoying. Stop cutting in when I’m making introductions.

The words burned in Ainz’ heart, but he had to swallow them. If he lashed out at her now, the effort he put into not killing her would have been wasted. He split his attention as though he were performing a simple task, and made the appropriate noises to someone who had come to see him. The other party also knew that Momon was being called away, so they wrapped things up in two or three sentences.

After the line of adventurers had dispersed, a quick look revealed that Gazef was gone. He suppressed the urge to burst into dance, and instead spoke calmly to Evileye.

"The legendary Warrior Captain seems to have left... oh dear. I think I spent too much time with the others. My apologies."

"Mmm? What do you know, he's gone. He's a busy person, it makes sense that he couldn't stay. Although, it does seem quite rude that he didn't even say a word of thanks to our ace, Momon-sama, who's going to protect the capital. How rude. Let me get him for you."

"Wait. Wait!"

He'd accidentally raised his voice. Ainz continued in a more even tone.

"No, it won't be a problem. Really, don't worry about it. I'm only here because Marquis Raeven hired me, anyway. Protecting the capital is simply business. Nothing that the Warrior Captain should praise me for."

"Is that so... I've been feeling that Momon-sama was a generous man."

Ainz thought he was being mocked, and he looked closely at Evileye. But he couldn't read her face, covered by her mask as it was.

I can't trust anyone who wears a mask after all... what a pain. Still, why does she wear the mask? It must be some kind of magic item...

It was at this moment that Ainz realized his mistake, and he scrambled to examine his surroundings. The mood of the room hadn't changed, and nobody had reacted with fear and hostility toward the adamantite adventurer Momon.

Illusions in YGGDRASIL were just a trivial way to change an item's appearance, but in this world, illusion magic was real. In that case, it wouldn't be unusual for items that pierced illusions to exist... In E-Rantel, nobody saw through it, and after I heard from the Magician's Guild leader that one needed experience to see through them, I got careless... there are also quite a few orichalcum ranked adventurers here, what a blunder...

Ainz surveyed the room again.

Nobody's on their guard, I guess my secret's still safe... from now on, I won't remove my helmet in the capital unless I have to. Someone might have a talent for seeing through illusions.

"...Evileye-san,"

"Please, call me Evileye. Momon-sama is my savior, you need not be so formal with me."

Ainz was only being polite. But if that was how she wanted it, he had no reason to refuse.

"Then, Evileye, let's go over there..."

"Of course!"

It was an extremely delighted reply. Not knowing what he had done to please her so, Ainz allowed himself to be dragged by Evileye toward the princess.

The adventurers started talking again as they saw the group heading toward the other room— Renner and her underlings, along with the two adamantite ranked adventurers.

Naturally, the central topic was Momon, the top-ranked adventurer.

"I heard the rumors from E-Rantel, but the real thing was beyond my expectations."

"Not just him, right? I've seen Red Drop too, and I got the same feeling from them. He seems perfect in just about every way. I guess being adamantite-ranked isn't just about strength."

The one addressing the two mithril ranked adventurers was one with a platinum plate on his chain.

"Is that so? Still, he was summoned by the princess and still took his time to say hello to novice adventurers. Someone like that can't possibly exist, right?"

"It certainly surprised me."

Murmurs of approval came from the adventurers around them.

During a mission like this where parties had to work with each other, it was only sensible to make introductions, in order to secure assistance and support for each other. One would certainly prefer to aid someone they knew rather than a stranger. However, the only ones who could even begin to help an adamantite ranked adventurer were all ranked mithril and above. As such, greeting a fresh adventurer could be said to be a waste of time. Which meant that Momon wasn't thinking of benefit for himself, but just wanted to deepen his friendship with others.

"Normally, you'd expect him to go over to the princess while his partner attended to the novices, right?"

"Ah, yes, that's what most people would normally do. It's what I'd do. You guys too, right?"

"Same here... this may sound kind of bad, but maybe he doesn't understand this sort of thing. Does he have his priorities straight?"

Those words could certainly be seen as an insult, but the man speaking them did not have a single iota of malice on his face.

"Maybe he does. Maybe his priorities are just different."

As though waiting for this, the man who had spoken earlier replied quickly.

"Then there's nobody better than him. I mean, look at him, he's adamantite-ranked and yet he treats the freshest copper-plates like they were battle buddies. Look at their faces."

"They totally worship him now."

True enough, the novice adventurers had a look on their faces like a kid who had just met their idol.

"Heh, yeah, if he treated me like that, I'd be his. I'd even give him my ass."

"Get lost, who the hell would want your nasty ass? He's got a beauty on his team."

"Yeah, he does. You think they've done it?"

"Of course they have, if not why would they form a team by themselves?"

"I heard it's not like that..."

The fourth man to interrupt had an orichalcum plate on his neck.

"You seem to be quite well-informed, with your rumors from E-Rantel. The strength of those two is unreal. Maybe it's because nobody else can keep up with them?"

"...have you been spying on us all this time?"

"Hahaha! Don't say that, you didn't care who was listening, did you?"

"Heh, well, I guess," the first adventurer said.

The Adventurer's Guildmaster clapped her hands to get everyone's attention.

"The operation starts in one hour, so we'll be moving out shortly. Because we don't have much time, please relay the message to any of your party members who aren't here. In any event, once we leave the palace, just stick with me.”

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month) 5th Day 1:12

They were gathered in the other room to make the final preparations for the operation. They considered when to break through, what to do when the enemy showed up in force, and how to deal with the possible complications which might arise. But in the end, they simply had too little information to make any concrete plans and the final conclusion was that they had to go with the flow.

The youth in white armor who had been listening quietly thus far suddenly broke his silence.

“Forgive me, Princess,”

“What is it?”

“I know another person who could become an arrow for this formation. He is a man with overwhelming fighting power. Would it be all right to ask for his aid? One arrow is good, but two would be better, and if they helped each other, I am sure they could defeat any demon that showed itself, no matter how powerful it was.”

“What’s this, Climb? Are you saying the Momon-sama I recommended isn’t enough?”

Evileye’s words had a razor-sharp edge to them. Climb’s eyes trembled with fear.

“No, no, of course not. That was never my intention—"

“Momon-sama is the strongest warrior in existence. I daresay that rather than helping him, the man you recommended would be nothing more than a handicap.”

The katana-wielding warrior, Brain, stepped in to defend Climb.

“That might not be so. I too have seen the person Climb speaks of. His strength is extraordinary. He felled Zero, strongest of the Six Arms, in one blow.”

“You are Brain Unglaus? The one who serves her Highness on the recommendation of Gazef Stronoff and Climb?”

“I serve Gazef, but before I am officially sworn in, I stay by the Princess’ side.”

“That you are much stronger than Climb is known to me, but even that isn’t a guarantee of the man’s strength. And besides, didn’t you lose to that old hag?”

“...Ara, didn’t you lose to her too? My apologies, Mr. Unglaus.”

“Uuuu…” Evileye whimpered as Lakyus scolded her.

“It, it wasn’t just her, you all were there too,”

“After you lost, you said you lost to Rigrit, not the rest of us.”

“You still remember that, Tina?”

Between the laughing Tina and the crying Evileye, the mood in the room had lightened up considerably.

At this point, Ainz asked a question.

“He sounds very interesting. What kind of person is he?”

Climb proudly stated the man’s name.

“His name is Sebas.”

“...hm? Seibath?” The name sounded familiar to Ainz. Was it merely a coincidence?

“...what is his personality like?”

After Climb’s explanation, Ainz nodded.

Isn’t that Sebas himself?!

How had he come into contact with Climb? What kind of relationship did they have? Was Climb one of Sebas’ contacts? Ainz had only skimmed the reports Sebas submitted, and he hadn’t bothered remembering any of the people he mentioned.

It couldn’t be helped, I was too busy…

Ainz’ anxiety only grew as he made that flimsy excuse to himself.

In any case, this boy was a valuable contact that Sebas had made. If he were disposed of too early, it would be a waste of Sebas’ hard work. And carelessly casting away the work of one’s underlings was something a superior should avoid at all costs.

It would be better to aid this boy here, and indirectly praise Sebas.

“I have not done battle with this Sebas before, so I cannot say which of us would be stronger.”

“Of course Momon-san is stronger than him!” Narberal stated in a voice brimming with confidence. Evileye quietly nodded in agreement.

Ainz couldn’t help but pat Narberal on the head.

"Well, if my companion says so, then there must be some truth to the observations of both sides. I believe he should be able to stand on equal footing with me."

"That was a surprisingly mature response. Unlike my companion... not only does she lack height but she is deficient in adaptability too."

"All right, all right, let's not embarrass ourselves in public. That's an order from the party leader. If there's nothing else to discuss, why don't we go pay Tia and Gagaran a visit?"

"Sounds like a plan."

The two of them had died and been revived. Although he had not seen the resurrection itself, he had heard all about it from others.

"Speaking of which, is it possible to use the energy of darkness to attack demons and the like?"

"...The energy of darkness?"

Evileye’s uncertain question drew a surprised response from Lakyus. She seemed to find the concept unthinkable.

"Ah, I heard from Gagaran, if you released the full power of the Demonic Sword Kilineyram, it could be powerful enough to destroy the entire country."

Lakyus' eyes went wide.

"Th-that can wait till later! There's something else to discuss, right?""

A demonic sword? Hang on, I think I've heard of this weapon before... not in YGGDRASIL, but this world... got it! The Demonic Sword Kilineyram, said to be able to radiate the power of darkness. Although... destroying an entire country? It sounds like an exaggeration, but it might have a power that comes close enough.

Ainz concluded that her red face was caused by anger and panic that her own trump card had been suddenly revealed.

Just as everyone's attention turned to Lakyus, there was a knocking on the door, and two men entered shortly after.

"Onii-sama, and Marquis Raeven,"

At Renner's words, everyone bowed their heads in respect.

This was the second time Ainz had met these two men. The first time was not long ago, when they had entered the capital. They had changed the terms of the quest he had been hired for. Instead of the Eight Fingers, he would be fighting against Jaldabaoth, and he would be working together with the gathered adventurers of the capital.

After the simple greeting, Ainz and the others were about to step outside because the princess wanted to address the two nobles. Most of the details of the battle plan had already been decided. Searching for Sebas had been abandoned due to a lack of time and manpower. All that was left was to wait for on-site orders.

"Then, everyone, I beseech all the gods to allow everyone here to come back alive and victorious... our hopes rest on all of you, or rather, on Momon-san. May fortune favor you."

After listening to Renner pray with her head bowed low, Ainz and the others quietly exited the room. The only ones left were Raeven and the second prince — Zanack Valurean Igana ryle Vaiself — and Renner.

The moment Climb left the room, Renner's expression changed, her green eyes freezing over like a lake in winter. Zanack shivered as he watched the change in her.

"We overheard the details in the secret room..."

That room was designed for eavesdropping, and the two of them had been listening from in there.

"There's one question you didn't answer. Why did you have to form the guards up into a battle line. Are they sacrifices?"

Guards were very weak. Even the lowliest of adventurers was more than a match for them. If they were attacked, the only reasonable response for them was to be massacred.

"Bait."

That word was what they had expected.

"The adventurers said so too; Jaldabaoth's army of low-ranked demons cannot be allowed to run free in the capital. Then, if they gorge themselves on the guards staked out as bait for them, certainly they will eventually kill their fill and be sated on slaughter, no?" Renner smiled.

It was almost impossible to settle things with fancy words and high-sounding ideals in this world. Everything one did had a price. Nobody understood that more clearly than the ones in power, whose responsibility was to limit the necessary sacrifices as much as possible.

From that point of view, Renner was the ideal bureaucrat.

However, humans were creatures of emotion, and the emotion they would feel when hearing of this plan was revulsion.

"Surely there must be a better way? Some way that doesn't involve sacrificing all the guards?"

"If there were, surely Prince Zanack would have mentioned one by now, no?"

Zanack fell silent.

It was true, he did not have a better plan than Renner's. He had ideas, certainly, but they were either impractical or impossible with the resources available. At the moment, all he could do was acknowledge that Renner's plan was the best of a bad lot.

Raeven shifted his gaze from the prince when he quieted himself, and then he voiced his own objections.

"Then, permit me to seek clarification. Why give Climb such a dangerous task?"

"For the same reason why Onii-sama and Marquis Raeven's men are patrolling the city."

Zanack had been making his rounds in the capital, putting on the act of the prince who cared for his people. After that, he had also begun spreading the rumors that the crown prince had been hiding in the safety of the royal castle. This would make himself look good and diminish his brother— who was his rival.

Did that mean Renner was doing the same thing— sending her subordinate on a dangerous mission of mercy in order to make herself look good?

But then, when one thought about how Renner had revealed her obsession over Climb yesterday, something was definitely wrong here.

Sensing his doubt, Renner carried on.

"Of course, Climb has a chance of dying. In that event, Lakyus will use a resurrection spell on him. It won't be cheap, of course, but an expense like these won't be a problem. And after he's been resurrected, Climb will be weakened from a loss of life energy. During that time, I will take care of him. I'm sure nobody will object to me caring for a person who died and was resurrected for following my orders."

"I see. That is certainly reasonable. You plan to deepen his affection for you."

"—is there a chance Lakyus might die as well?"

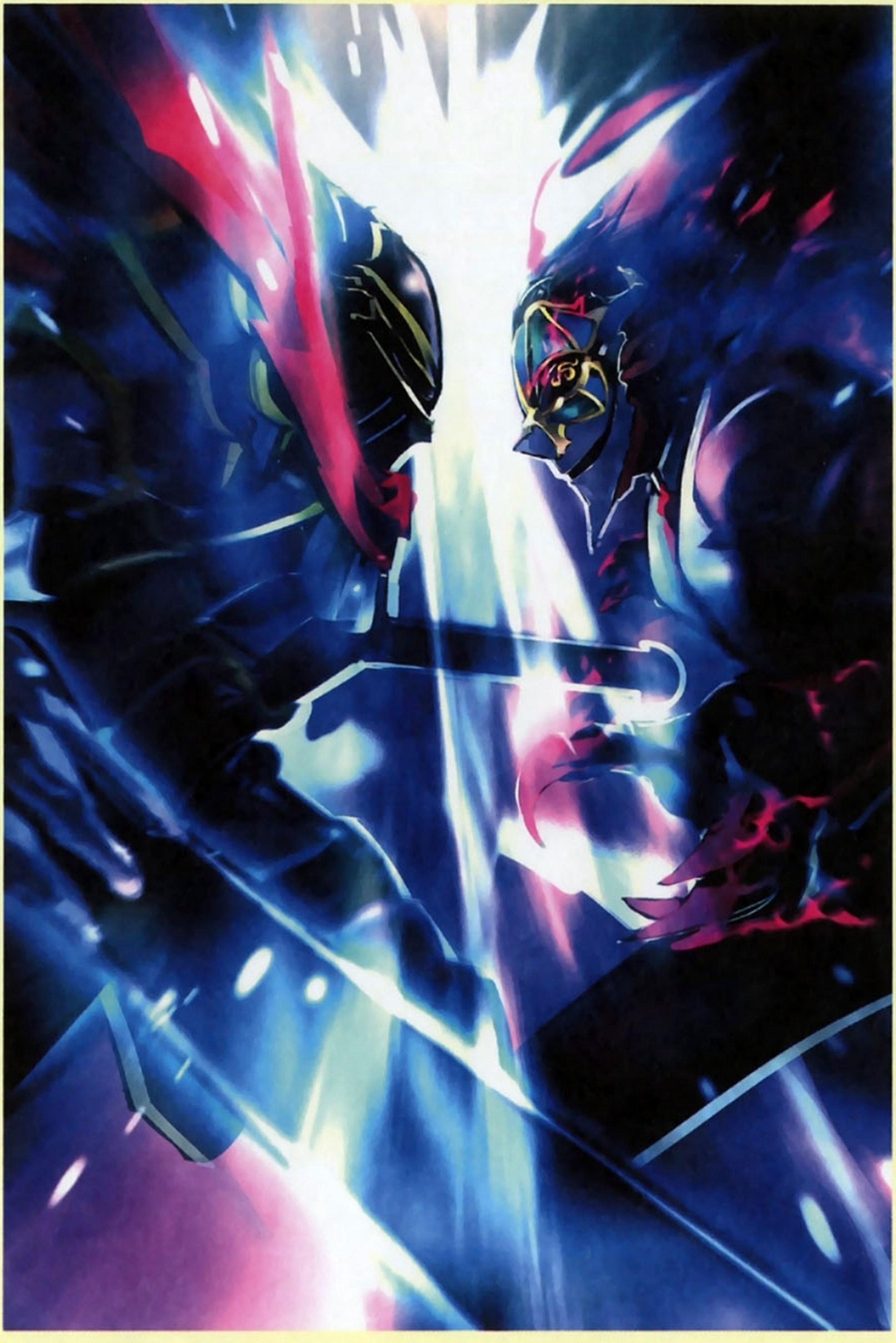
"That is a valid concern," Renner said to Raeven, whose head was lowered. "But one that has been planned for. During the dangerous period of the sortie, there will be additional people in place to protect her. The guildmaster does not want a person who can resurrect the dead to be killed, so she agreed without hesitation.”

"It seems everything is within your calculations, little sister."

Yes, his radiant, laughing sister. Zanack trembled in his boots.

Beside him, Raeven also fought to suppress the chill that ran down his spine.

Chapter 11 - The Final Battle of the Disturbance



11章 動乱最終決戦

Part 1

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 02:30

The flickering flames of the barrier had no heat at all, making it seem like an illusion. The adventurers standing at the front exchanged glances with their parties, and then they gathered their courage and plunged boldly through the firewall.

Even though the supporting priests from the temples had already cast spells of fire protection on them, they still held their breath, for fear that their lungs would be burned

...even though they already said the flames wouldn't cause any physical harm.

That thought ran through Lakyus' head as she watched the wall of fire from the rear of the formation.

Still, it was too soon to celebrate the fact that the flames were harmless. If they were not meant to cause injury, then there must have been another reason for Jaldabaoth to conjure them. That was what she had to puzzle out.

If I can't figure it out, there's no point wasting energy on it. Who was it who said that I should be using my head for better things... Evileye, or Uncle?

The barrier of magical flames was like an illusion, offering no resistance and bearing no heat, and just like that, she was through.

Lakyus looked around at the worried faces of the adventurers who were stepping through the barrier.

The plan had called for the formation of a defensive line, but forming a neat line of battle in the middle of a city was very difficult. Therefore, they had used four parties of orichalcum ranked adventurers as the linchpins of the formation, assigning each of the adventurers to one of them. Someone looking down from above would see something like a beast with all four legs spread.

Since they were the cores of the formation, it was only natural that the orichalcum-ranked adventurers would become the leaders. But right now, they were filled with unease and tension. Lakyus hoped that they could hide their fear and inspire courage in the others around them.

Should I take to the front after all?

Certainly, if an adamantite ranked adventurer like herself stood at their head, morale would surely increase. But right now, Lakyus had no reliable allies by her side. Even if she was adamantite ranked, a lone Blue Rose was less effective than an orichalcum-ranked party. As such, she had handed command of the vanguard to them.

Even if they trusted me, running in and making a fuss would only fill them with unease. But... ah, I should just go to the front and see what happens.

With that, Lakyus stepped through the wall of fire.

A freshly silenced world spread ahead of them. The streets were the same as those of any other in the capital, if you overlooked the fact that there was no presence of human life and many of the residences had been destroyed.

"What happened to the residents? Are they hiding? There’s no smell of blood.”

“Impossible. Look, the doors have been broken down. I fear the people might have been taken somewhere."

"We need to be wary of demons lurking within the houses, should we do a room-to-room search? That will take a lot of time."

"It'll be safer to contact Lakyus-san and wait for further instructions, right?"

"Then, let's hurry up and—"

"There'll no need for that."

Straightening up by reflex at the sound of the voice, the speaking adventurers turned to look behind them. They stared in goggle-eyed surprise at Lakyus, who had just arrived.

"The iron and copper-ranked adventurers will stay behind to search the houses. One mithril-ranked team will remain behind to supervise. The people behind will spread out into the formation and advance. Any objections?"

The shaking heads said there were none.

"Then, let us advance."

Lakyus walked in line with the orichalcum-ranked adventurers. An uncomfortable silence settled around them. It was hard to believe that there had been life here until this evening.

"...speaking of which, Momon-san will be alright, won’t he?"

Lakyus understood how uneasy they were with pinning all their hopes on Momon.

"He'll be fine. Evileye herself admitted that he was even stronger than her. The real problem is the one that fought him to a standstill, the enemy leader, Jaldabaoth. How strong is he, anyway..."

The nearby adventurers heard this and their faces drooped in despair.

"Ah, sorry, don't worry about it. We just need to do what we've been assigned to do, that's all."

"Aye, that's true. It makes me jealous as hell to admit it, but I guess each of us has been tasked to do what we're most suited for. In that case, everyone, forward!"

Standing at the head of the group, together with the orichalcum-ranked adventurers, Lakyus stepped forward

Her hand gripped the Demonic Sword Kilineyram. Its surface was like a stretch of night sky, speckled with sparkling stars.

They had not walked for long before the sound of a distant explosion carried over softly from the distance. The ones who trembled were the lower ranked adventurers. The ones who prepared for battle were the middle ranked adventurers. The ones who scanned their surroundings were the upper ranked adventurers. And the ones who looked straight ahead were the highest ranking adventurers. Amidst this sea of reactions, Lakyus stared out into the distance with a piercing gaze.

"The party on that side has entered combat."

Probably not Tina's group.

"If they've been moving in at the same rate as ourselves, we ought to be encountering enemy resistance soon."

"...What about from above?"

"We have scouts in place, and none of them have reported anything so far."

"That's good. Demons have a lot of flying-type creatures among their numbers. If they spread out in the capital, it would be pretty bad. So we need to draw their attention to the ground where we are now."

"Which means that the plan is essentially unchanged."

"That's right... hm, what's that, did you hear something?"

"Aye, I hear it. Dogs barking. Hey, what's that?"

The arcane magic caster answered the question.

"I haven't confirmed it with my eyes yet, but I think it's a hellhound. Its special ability is fiery breath. I think it has a difficulty ranking of fifteen or so."

"Difficulty... yeah, speaking of which, what rank were Jaldabaoth and the insect maid?"

Lakyus was lost as to how she should answer. If she was honest, it would most likely shatter their resolve, but if they went into battle with a false impression of the enemy because she lied to them, it would be just as disastrous. She agonized about it for a while before deciding to tell the truth.

"...150."

"Aye?"

Everyone who heard Lakyus' voice had the same reaction.

"The insect maid's difficulty ranking was at least 150. Jaldabaoth himself is estimated at 200 or more."

"Hah?!"

Everyone aside from Lakyus was speechless. That much was expected. Even the highest-ranking orichalcum adventurers would only rate around 80 on the difficulty rankings. Although one could still triumph over a foe ranked roughly 15 points over oneself, trying to do the same with an enemy ranked almost twice as high as oneself was nothing short of laughable. And then—

"Wait a minute! Are you saying Momon-san is going to fight that difficulty 200 monster by himself?"

"Exactly. That's why I said we'd just be getting in the way."

"But that's not the same... you said 200? Are you kidding me? Are all adamantite ranked adventurers that strong?"

"If only. Even we’re ranked around 90 at best."

"Then... then how the hell are we even supposed to win?!"

The adventurers looked around, holding their breath.

Lakyus had not lied, but neither had she told them the whole truth. Although Lakyus herself was rated at ninety, Evileye was over one hundred and fifty, which was how she had come to the conclusion about the insect maid and Jaldabaoth. And that was also why Evileye was not part of this defensive line.

In order to quickly recover her expended mana, she had chosen to meditate and rest. After that, she had followed Momon to where Jaldabaoth was, in order to provide support so Momon could battle Jaldabaoth one-on-one. Their fear was that they would encounter the insect maid again.

While Lakyus was lost in thought, she felt the depressive mood around her prickling on her skin. Everyone's morale had plummeted, and there were murmurs about abandoning the whole thing and fleeing the capital.

As she had predicted, everyone was feeling demoralized. Lakyus knew because the first time she heard Evileye talk about their battle, she had felt the same way herself.

"You heard Evileye, right? Momon-san is the kind of man who can fight evenly with Jaldabaoth. Because of that, we're trusting everything to Momon-san, and instead we're going to do what we can do."

"B-but if Jaldabaoth is fighting Momon-san, then what if the insect maid appears here?"

"Leave that to us, Blue Rose. Evileye has a special item that allows her to teleport over to us. She's got a way of dealing with the insect maid, so she can overcome that difficulty gap and beat her."

That brought a wave of cheers from the adventurers. It seemed that their fighting spirit was restored.

Just in the nick of time

The roars of beasts came from the way ahead, along with the sound of footsteps.

"They're coming. We'll build our defensive line here. The people on the flying disks above will drop into the side roads. Leave the main road to me!"

The beasts were on the main road. Though they looked like large dogs, their eyes were filled with an infernal intelligence, and in place of drool, flames leaked from their maws.

There were fifteen of these hellhounds here. Standing before them was Lakyus, who gripped the demonic sword Kilineyram with both hands.

"You petty demons, don't you dare look down on me."

With a prayer to the water god on her lips, Lakyus clove the leaping hellhound in half with a single strike. The floating swords surrounding her acted as shields, blocking the attacks of the hellhounds from her flanks. She kicked away another one that was snapping at her ankles.

Lakyus was handling six hellhounds by herself, and the rest went on to attack the other adventurers. The weaker ones took them on one at a time, while the stronger ones handled multiple hellhounds at once. In this way, they whittled down the numbers facing them. By the time Lakyus had slain all six of hers, the others were done as well.

"Tend to the wounded!"

"No problem, Lakyus-san!"

Of course, they hadn't gotten through untouched, but the injuries weren't severe. Considering they had to conserve their mana, it was quite an auspicious start.

"People on the sides, I say again! Advance 50 meters and hold!"

The cry to advance echoed from both sides. Holding her sword, Lakyus went forth as well.

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 02:41

Three men ran down the dark and narrow alleyways. Nobody else was there with them.

These three men were Climb, Brain, and the former orichalcum ranked thief that had accompanied them during their attack against Zero's base.

The adventurers working for Marquis Raeven were all patrolling the capital’s streets in order to hunt down any demons who broke through the containment line. Climb had only managed to obtain the services of the thief because according to Marquis Raeven, the man himself had asked to help Climb out. That was to repay the kindness Climb had shown by blocking Zero's attack on him and for healing him. In addition, Raeven wanted to repay the favor he owed to Renner.

Thanks to the thief's choice of routes, they had not encountered a single demon so far. They might not even have made it here without him.

Although they had some confidence in facing demons who relied purely on strength and speed, they would be done for if any demons who could use special abilities showed up. Given that this team was a largely mundane one that lived and died by their steel, they would have a hard time defending against attacks that weren't purely physical in nature.

Their acquaintance had only been a brief one, but because of this, the thief understood that Climb and Brain were sorely deficient in this department, which was why he had joined this pair of clearly suicidal men.

Brain silently thanked him as he ran on, hunkering down to reduce the size of his silhouette. Gradually, the style of the surrounding buildings began to change; the amount of non-residential buildings began to increase. It seemed they were nearing their objective.

"I have to ask, why are we headed for the warehouses?"

Climb answered the thief, who was inspecting their surroundings.

"Renner-sama mentioned that if they were rounding people up and taking them prisoner, they would need a big space to control and imprison all of them. With that in mind, it would be easier to separate families and lock them up in several big warehouses instead."

"I see. If the families are split up, they'll think they're all being taken hostage and be less likely to flee. If that's the case, we have to hurry... well. Even if we double back on our original route, we still need to pick a safe path."

"Thanks. We're counting on you."

There was more to do after the rescue. While thinking about how they would make it out of there, one thing that stood out as absolutely important was a safe axis of retreat. The choice of route was crucial, especially since they would be moving a lot of people.

But how long could this streak of luck last? Brain wondered.

This mission was essentially ordering Climb to die.

Since the other side was rounding up the civilians, that meant they had a plan for them. In turn, that meant they would be watching them closely. And according to what he had heard, the enemy leader Jaldabaoth was a being who could kill adamantite ranked adventurers in seconds. Any sentries he placed would be formidable indeed.

Brain's attention turned to Climb by his side.

He had worn his white armor to let people know that he was Renner's knight. Currently, he was stroking his gauntlet... or rather, the ring he wore on the ring finger underneath it.

Gazef himself had given him that ring.

It was something he had obtained from an ancient granny who used to be part of Blue Rose. According to the legends, it was an extremely rare item born of ancient magic, that could raise a warrior's powers beyond its limits.

You must return alive. Brain recalled Gazef's face as he said that.

Gazef had not shown any particular emotion at that time. No anger, sorrow, or despair. He understood that as a warrior in service to a lord, there would eventually come a time when he would be ordered into a battle that would result in his death. However, in order to aid Climb without being physically present, he had lent him the ring.

Brain had been following the thief's hand signals when he suddenly sensed a presence. Looking up, his line of sight followed the building—in that instant, Brain felt an impact that seemed to stop his heart.

On the edge of a roof of a nearby warehouse was — judging by her height and body type — a girl with long, blonde hair. She wore a dress made of pure white fabric that had been elaborately embroidered, and under the hem he could see that she wore a pair of high heels which sparkled like diamonds. Combined with her extravagant array of rings, jewelry and other necklaces, it made one think that she was some noble’s daughter, or a wealthy heiress of some sort.

Her beautiful figure, illuminated by the wall of fire, contrasted sharply with her bone-white mask, yet, her mystique was not diminished in the slightest. And in contrast to her striking appearance, her presence was far too subdued, as though she were nothing more than a wraith in an oversaturated world.

Her clothes and the color of her hair were completely different from that time. Back then, she might have been said to have been born of the night, but this time, she seemed to have descended from the moon. But even so, there was no doubt that they were the same person. The image Brain had seared into his soul from before layered itself over the person he was looking at now.

He was sure of it. Under the mask of the young girl above him was the face of that monster— Shalltear Bloodfallen. It seemed that she had not noticed them yet, but if it was truly that same monster standing before him, then no matter how far apart they were, they would be instantly killed if she discovered them. Was there a way they could flee without being detected?

There was none.

When Brain realised this, he felt as if he was putting a foot on cracked ice. He was suddenly aware of the oily, disgusting sweat oozing out of his pores.

Brain signaled to Climb and the thief, indicating he had something to say. Sensing that he had spotted something, the two of them halted and held their breaths.

What now? What can I do to get out of this? If we fight her, we'll be killed for *sure. Even if we tried to run, we'd be chased down and killed anyway. Back then I used an escape tunnel, but there aren't any here now. But why is she here? Is she looking for me?*

Brain smiled bitterly at that last thought.

If that were the case, then there was only one solution to this problem.

"Climb-kun, I'll go buy us some time. Use it to flee."

After that, Brain looked to the thief, and bowed his head.

"I'll leave him to you."

Without wasting any time on second thoughts, Brain immediately leapt up the building where Shalltear was, hoisting himself up in a single motion. Although he did not have the climbing skills of a thief, the building was only two stories high, and a warrior's arm strength could easily scale it. On the roof, Shalltear remained where he had first seen her.

Brain's heart pounded mightily. He was scared, terrified beyond the capacity for rational thought. The memories of his desperate flight from her reappeared in his mind. In spite of that, he was still able to muster up the courage to face her head-on.

"...is something the matter?"

The ice-cold woman's voice called out, only slightly muffled by the mask she wore.

Doesn't she recognize me? What's this, some kind of game?

The best course of action now should be to pretend he didn’t know her and observe her responses. With that in mind, Brain raised his voice and answered her.

“I’m here because I saw a strange woman on a rooftop. What are you doing in the capital?”

“And why, pray tell, must I answer you? Perhaps you could tell me what a human is doing in this area. Are you the only one who has infiltrated this far?”

His heartbeat sped up and increased in intensity. Although he didn’t know where Climb was, he knew he could not let his eyes leave hers. In order to confuse her, he raised his voice and continued speaking.

"Are you looking for someone else? Not me?"

"And why would I seek you out in particular?"

"This is the second time we've crossed paths. From the start, I've been unable to forget your beautiful face."

Shalltear reached out her hand, and lightly stroked her mask.

"...do you have the wrong person, perhaps?"

Brain was at a loss for words. He wanted to ask if he'd gotten the right person, but he immediately abandoned that idea. It was her. There could be no other.

...so she's saying, I can't be bothered to remember a puny ant?

If she wasn't taunting him, if Shalltear truly did not remember, then that must mean she did not have even the slightest bit of interest in him. For an overwhelmingly powerful being like Shalltear, that was not arrogance or overestimating one's abilities.

"No... my apologies. Maybe... perhaps. Yes, this is the first time we've met."

"Is it, really? Well, even if you understand that now, it makes no difference. Perhaps it would be safer to just kill you off. Do you wish to live? To die? If you genuflect before me and lick my shoes, it might please me enough to change my mind."

"Sorry, but I think I'll pass on that."

Brain settled down into a sword-drawing stance as he slowed his breathing. The technique he was using was, of course, ‘Field’. Needless to say, though, Brain knew it was useless against Shalltear.

"Haaaa..."

The dumbfounded Shalltear gently shook her head.

"You don't understand the difference in strength between us, do you? How annoying..."

Actually, I do understand, Brain thought as he looked at her.

Shalltear scared him so badly he wanted to throw up. That much he understood. But knowing this, why hadn't he fled yet?

The corner of his mouth turned up as he thought about this question.

If his heart was a lake, then it was perfectly still and calm. Even in the face of a being that made him want to flee at all costs, he still managed to retain his composure. This serenity was quite unnerving.

Shalltear stalked forward again. It was like a repeat of the last time, and surely the outcome would be Brain's utter defeat. The sum total of his life's work, his effort and dedication and dreams, would be shattered with the contemptuous ease of a child breaking a toy.

That's right. That's how it'll be.

He was terrified.

Up till now, he had been through countless battles, wagering his life on the edge of his blade. Suddenly admitting his fear of death now would be very embarrassing. This battle felt like he was throwing himself off a cliff. Even if could muster up the determination to die in battle, he could not prepare himself to commit suicide.

The thing was, the feeling of abject terror that he'd carried with him, from the bandit hideout all the way to the capital, was mysteriously absent.

Brain recalled the back of a certain young man.

He was a youth who was far, far weaker than him. Who had, even in the midst of a roaring torrent of murderous intent, stood firm, despite his body trembling like jelly.

And then, Brain laughed.

The old man had said that sometimes humans could display unexpected power, but Brain knew that it was impossible for him.

He was not like that youth, who would give everything he had for the princess he served, and he was not like Gazef who could offer his body and life for king and country. Those two could do it, but not him. Brain was a selfish man who could only think of doing as he desired.

Even if that's the case... huh. Maybe this is how I square things with him, by buying him time to flee.

Taking one step at a time, Shalltear raised her left pinky finger, approaching at an unnaturally slow pace.

Was it because his heightened perceptions made it seem as though time had slowed down for everyone but him, or was it because Shalltear really was moving that slowly, to prolong his fear? It felt like both were the case, and he smiled ruefully.

Well, that's just how she is.

Even though they had only met for a total of a few minutes, Brain felt like he understood her better than any other woman he had ever met.

Two more steps, huh... two steps before she enters the range of my sword...

He wanted to run, but more than that, he didn’t want to let go of the weapon in his hands. His whole life had been spent holding a sword. Perhaps it was fitting that it should end the same way.

Brain had found his answer. With that in his mind, he followed Shalltear's silhouette with his eyes.

"Live by the sword... die by the sword?"

In that moment, Brain's mind cleared. The enemy was a distant existence, and his thoughts were sharpened into a single razor's edge.

Brain used ‘Instant Flash’. It was a martial art that no human opponent could detect, let alone defend against.

Even so, he could not touch the monster before him, not even if he stacked the ‘Field’ and ‘Instant Flash’ techniques.

At that level, his opponent could still stop it between her fingers. Therefore, Brain added one more technique to the mix.

The face of Gazef Stronoff rose before his eyes.

If not for him, I would never have ended up here.

He had thought that way at first, but after his various encounters in the capital, he had changed his mind.

Brain now felt nothing but camaraderie for his greatest nemesis— no, his rival. He had accepted that he would die here and now.

Perhaps it's too late... but thank you, my greatest enemy… and dearest friend.

With that, his heart turned calm. Without confusion, he allowed himself to let go. Even the shame of the past had vanished.

"—Aaaaaaaaa!"

Brain cried out like some sort of strange bird. It came from the depths of his soul, carrying the full power of his being.

He executed an incredibly high-speed ‘Instant Flash’, aiming it based on the information gained from the use of his ‘Field’. But it didn't stop there— from the ‘Instant Flash’, he continued into another move.

That move was—

Four simultaneous sword strikes.

That was Gazef Stronoff's technique, the very same one that had defeated Brain Unglaus at the martial arts tournament where they had first fought. It was a move that Brain had admired, even as he told himself he was only learning and imitating it in order to fully understand his opponent. It was a technique that he had sealed away with his hatred and resentment.

But now, in this moment, freed of all self-doubt and restraint, Brain used it without hesitation.

"「Fourfold Slash of Light」!"

In truth, the Fourfold Slash of Light had a massive weakness.

Executing four simultaneous attacks would place a massive burden on the body, and it would cause the attacks to scatter in different directions. Because this technique's accuracy was low, even its creator Gazef only used it when surrounded by multiple opponents.

Although the Fourfold Slash of Light did not make as many attacks as the Sixfold Slash of Light, it was easier to direct all the attacks toward the same opponent. Even so, getting them all to connect was still quite unlikely.

This wild attack should not be able to strike Shalltear Bloodfallen. Brain was very clear on that.

But Brain possessed a martial art that Gazef did not. It was a support technique that provided an incredible power-up within its radius—‘Field’.

The four wild swings were corrected mid-flight by the superhuman precision of ‘Field’, following the path Brain had visualized for them. All four blows struck home with complete accuracy at super-speed.

Even a hero — one who had surpassed all other humans — would have had trouble blocking that attack. Mortals, wrought of weak flesh and bones, would not be able to even muster up the stamina to defend against it. This was a strike that had transcended the realm of mortal ability.

But Shalltear Bloodfallen was well above humanity herself, standing in a league of her own that nobody could ever hope to exceed. To someone like her, those four simultaneous strikes were little more than a snail taking a stroll in the sun.

"Hmph."

Shalltear snorted at him as his left hand moved faster than the eye could see. A sound of metallic clashing rang out through the night air. What had happened was that the simultaneous deflection of the four strikes had blended into a single sound.

All four blows had been repelled, leaving her untouched.

Shalltear shrugged her shoulders, laughing under her mask. It wasn't directed at the foolish warrior before her eyes, but rather at herself for having played along with him thus far.

But then, in the next moment, Shalltear's eyes went wide.

Right now, if someone had converted their ability into data and compared them, he would undoubtedly be cheering for Brain. It was a miracle, like the sun rising from the west, a sight that would fill people with awe and respect.

"...eh?"

Before her eyes, the nail of her left pinky finger had been shortened. It was a tiny flaw less than a centimeter in length.

Shalltear considered the current situation. The place which had been cut was the same place which had been used to repel all the strikes.

Come to think of it, those four strikes had been executed in two pairs, one above and one below. They had intersected on the spot where Shalltear had intercepted the attacks.

"...were you aiming for this?"

"Kuh— Ahahahaha!"

Suddenly, the man in front of her began laughing. *Is he insane?* Shalltear wondered. But it did not feel that way. More likely, he was laughing heartily over the fact that he had managed to slice off the tip of her fingernail, but she did not understand. So what if he managed to do it?

Shalltear’s nails and teeth were like natural weapons, so using specialized weapon-destruction techniques to sunder them was technically possible. However, they would simply grow back with the application of healing magic, and in comparison to manufactured weapons of a similar class, they were far more resistant to harm. They were on the same level as Divine class magic weapons like the Spuit

Lance.

As such, Shalltear could not understand the reason for this man's laughter.

Cutting off a fragment of her fingernail would not change anything. Shalltear looked at the other four fingers of her left hand. Even if the nail of the little finger was shaved down a little, it would still be enough to tear a human body to pieces.

"...so, cutting it off means you pass, then?"

The man's eyes went round, and his jubilation intensified.

"I'm very grateful to you for such praise. My sword... my life was not spent in vain, after all. At the end, I still managed to make some progress toward the peak!"

That was not praise, however. Shalltear was just mocking him.

However, she could tell that his feelings were honest. In other words, the man was truly rejoicing about being able to clip a fingernail.

Did he have a few screws loose? Come to think of it, he had spouted a pack of rubbish when they had first met. All in all, it made her feel uneasy, so she had better kill him quickly. With that in mind, Shalltear stepped forward and—

—and Demiurge's call to battle came through.

Shalltear knew what that meant. Despite herself, she looked over to the distance, but she could not sense a presence.

"Is that the effect of Master's ring?"

One of the rings that Ainz wore would completely conceal him from all kinds of divination-type magic. It was normally issued to all the guardians, but it could also erase the presence of the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

With a sense of regret for not being able to sense her master, Shalltear turned her head back, and found that the human with a screw loose in his head had vanished.

Ah! I completely forget about that strange fellow!

After a quick look around, Shalltear discovered that the man had turned his back to her and was busy jumping down into an alley. He must have made his move while she was distracted.

There's no way a mere mortal could escape unscathed from me.

If she used magic to slow down the flow of time, she could catch up to him before he even hit the ground. Without hesitation, Shalltear cast her spell.

"「Time Accelerator」!"

The air felt thick and viscous as Shalltear moved through it at incredible speeds, heading toward the place the man would land. As she descended, she observed his posture as he leapt down with glacial slowness. Although she could not harm him directly while the spell was in effect, she could still set up an ambush and make other preparations.

Just as well. I'll open my arms to receive him as he falls. Surely a human like him will be overjoyed to be embraced by a beauty like myself.

The corner of Shalltear's mouth quirked up as she thought of the expression that she could see on his face. As she landed on the ground, just before the spell ended, she sensed another presence close by.

—*What's this?*

It was a young man in a suit of pure white plate armor with a roguish-looking companion.

Brain landed in the alley and looked back up, but Shalltear was no longer there.

She didn't pursue me? No, that's not right, what if she wants me to lead her to the others, like last time?

He had not planned to flee at first. His thoughts had been that it would be easier to buy time for Climb and the rest by escaping to lower ground.

Brain's every action had been to let Climb escape. It was because of that that he had put on this entire show of running away.

But as he ran, he discovered something that should not have been. That something was Climb and the thief, who were waving to him.

How could this—

Brain's mind filled with emotion— intense anger and frustration.

His face distorted by wrath, he charged toward the two of them, grabbed them by the collar and kept running. This was obviously slower than just running by himself, but Brain was not calm enough to have considered that.

After they had run for some distance, and after checking repeatedly behind him to make sure that Shalltear had not caught up with them, he slammed Climb against a nearby wall. Because Brain had not thought to control his strength, Climb practically bounced off it.

"Why? Why didn't you run?!"

Although his emotions were on the verge of overflowing, Brain still had enough presence of mind to keep himself from shouting out loud.

"That... that was..."

Brain grabbed hold of Climb again.

"That was what?! Were you worried about me?! I clearly told you two to escape!"

"Wait, wait, wait, wait, I don't know what happened, but back then, you just said some stuff and ran off. The fault isn't Climb-kun's alone!"

After hearing the thief's words, Brain began to calm down. It was true that he hadn't explained anything at all. He forced himself to take deep breaths.

"...forgive me, Climb-kun. I seem to have gone a little mad."

"Ah, no, you must forgive me too, for not heeding your words."

"No, I was the one at fault, and I am truly sorry. Things just... happened."

"Hey, Unglaus-san, what happened? We may not have known each other very long, but just now, you seemed like a completely different person, like a novice who just picked up the sword."

"Stopping here is very dangerous. I'll tell you once we move. Let's just say I met a monster who could give Sebas-san a run for his money."

The three of them moved on warily. It might have been sheer luck that they had not met Jaldabaoth's underlings while they were fleeing, but counting on that luck to continue would only end badly.

"Then... you're unhurt, so it must have been a complete victory, right? Or… no, you settled it with words?"

"Not so. It was with the sword... I cut her fingernail off."

Brain was filled with glee as he said it. There was no mistake about it — he, Brain Unglaus, had clipped the nail of the monster Shalltear Bloodfallen.

"I cut her fingernail off," Brain repeated. He was trying his best to control the overflowing joy that welled up from the depths of his heart, but even so, he was practically trembling with emotion.

"I... I see. Cutting a fingernail off... I guess doing it with a sword is pretty impressive..."

The thief shook his head and trembled slightly.

"...that nail belonged to someone who could rival Sebas-sama. Don't you think she must have been very strong?"

"Is that so? As expected of Brain Unglaus..."

Brain struggled to contain his girlish excitement as he was showered in praise. He shook his head to clear these foolish ideas from it.

"Climb-kun, no, Climb. After seeing Sebas-sama you should know, right? There are people stronger than me everywhere. Even someone like Momon the Black has probably reached Sebas-sama's level too. So keep this in mind, when I tell you to run, run. Even if you try and help, you'll just get in the way. Please promise me, next time, don't question what I say and just do it."

"I... I understand."

"Then that's good. You're serving the Princess, right? Because of that, you could endure Sebas-sama's killing intent, right? Then make sure you keep your priorities straight."

Brain patted Climb on the shoulder, and looked back at the direction from which they had fled.

Why? Why hasn't she pursued me yet? Is there some reason? I totally didn't *expect her to show up here. Could it be, it was because of the warehouse district?*

Brain recalled Renner's words.

Could it be that she was looking for the same item as Jaldabaoth? If that's the case, wouldn't that make her one of Jaldabaoth's agents?

Since a monster like Shalltear had shown up, the only sensible thing to do would be to abandon the mission and flee right away, but would Climb be able to do that? Since he had already heard Brain's lecture, he would probably listen to Brain and escape.

Would that really be a good thing?

It was obviously good to be concerned for Climb's safety, but people sometimes chose to put their lives in danger for the sake of something else, and being ordered by Renner on this suicide mission was such an occasion.

Brain did not know what kind of life Climb had lived before he earned his name, or how he had served the Golden Princess afterward. Even so, Brain did not think it would be wise to unnecessarily interfere with Climb's determination to carry out Renner's orders.

Brain pulled the thief over, and spoke to him after making sure Climb couldn't see or hear them talk.

"Hey, do you think it was a good idea to bring Climb here? Wouldn't it be better to make sure he went home safe rather than completing the mission?"

"...You're a big old softy, aren't you?"

"Enough with that nonsense. And considering you're the one who volunteered to be the emergency stand-in for this suicide mission, I think you're the bigger softy."

The thief laughed nervously, and then looked at the confused youth who was facing them.

"How shall I put it... seeing a kid like him fight so hard made me remember the days when I was still young, even if it was just for a while. I think I understand how you feel about this too. Even so..."

The thief's eyes shone with a sharp and brilliant conviction.

"It was the path he chose. We have no right to force him off it."

Brain sighed.

"I'm interested in that brat too. I'm pretty certain how he feels about the princess, judging by the look in his eye and the way he reacts when put in danger. Hell of a kid, isn't he? He's honest and brash. Because of that... he's like a thief who's set his eyes on the Kingdom's most valuable treasure."

"That’s right. He might still die, but at least he'll have chosen it."

With that, Brain made up his mind.

"Then, we'd best get a move on. Don't know when Shalltear might catch up with us."

◆◆◆

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:38

The adventurers from the palace retreated past the barricade to the rear. The guards they passed through had been ordered to hold the line until the adventurers' wounds could be healed.

Once the adventurers had passed through the opening in the barricade, it was immediately filled up again with planks and other debris.

Nobody else remained in front of the barricade. This meant that this was the frontline.

Looking back, the guards could see the ragged adventurers as they limped towards the rear. Fresh claw and scorch marks adorned their armor, as did the sprays of fresh blood.

Further behind that was the wall of fire burning in the background. They had penetrated roughly 150 meters into enemy territory. Indeed, judging by the dread that the once-familiar capital had inspired in them, it felt like a foreboding, alien world; enemy territory indeed.

The adventurers had spent time looting the surrounding houses and tearing parts of them down to form a barricade. The guards had thought it would be an useful obstacle, but now it seemed puny and insignificant. It felt like it would crumble at the first sign of serious resistance.

"It's okay. The demons haven't pursued the adventurers. The enemy hasn't chosen to attack, they're just making a strong defense. No problems. They won't attack."

Someone else was repeating these words again. They were meant to mask his anxiety and embodied his wish to return home alive. He repeated his prayer to his god.

There were forty-five men manning the barricade. They carried spears and wore leather armor. Among these was a man in a helmet, Bona Ingray. He was one of the many guard captains mobilized tonight.

Though he had the title of captain, in truth he was no different than the other guards. His physique was nothing special, nor was his mind particularly sharp. The younger guards were stronger and faster than him. He had made it to this position simply because he had served as a guard until he was forty, and because there was nobody else to fill it.

His face turned pale, and his hands gripped his spear so tightly the edges of his fingers turned white. Looking closely, one could see that his legs were trembling. His gaze was fixed forward solely because he did not want to see something horrible. His entirely unreliable posture only increased the guards' unease further.

Then again, it was to be expected, considering this was the first time their lives would actually be on the line in a battle.

The Kingdom fought with the Empire every year, sending troops to Kattse Plain. But the guards were tasked with the protection of the city, and thus they were not dispatched to the frontlines. Because of this, the position of city guard was coveted by those citizens who did not want to fight against the Empire. But now—

They had had ample experience dealing with squabbles between drunken peasants, but there had never been a case where they had to fight to the death. Because of that, their fear grew even further. The only reason they did not break and flee was because they knew running away would be an unforgivable sin.

Even if they were somehow absolved, they would still be guilty of not protecting the city properly. That was the sole reason why they had not been sent to the front. If they failed in doing that, then they would surely be forced into the frontlines during the next war with the

Empire.

"I'm going to quit my job as a guard if I make it through this in one piece."

Bona grumbled to himself quietly, and many of the people around him agreed.

"Do you still remember what the adventurers said?"

"Are we talking about what to do if we encounter hellhounds, great hellhounds, gazer devils and demon swarms?"

"That's right. Does anyone know anything about fighting demons? Especially their weak points, what they're bad at, that sort of thing."

Nobody answered; they were too busy looking at each other.

Bona's expression conveyed how useless he thought they were without having to say a word. When he saw dissatisfaction on some of the others' faces, he looked away and slammed the butt of his spear into the ground.

"Damn it! Can't those adventurers explain better?"

The adventurers who had shared their knowledge with the guards had been heavily wounded and were falling back as fast as they could. Just telling them the name of the enemy was all they could do, let alone telling them how they looked like, or how to fight them.

However, it would be too harsh on the adventurers to solely blame them for this situation. There was no proper communication between the guards and the adventurers, and as a result the amount of information being shared was low. In fact, forming the defense line out of guards who didn't know anything could be blamed on the senior guards as well. Also, not all guards were uninformed about the demons. Under different circumstances, some of them might have learned something about the enemy.

One such platoon of guards had sent some of their members to help the adventurers retreating past them, and had learned a lot in the process.

This group, however, had not done so because their leader was frozen with fear and had not even turned to look at the retreating adventurers, and he certainly did not want to decrease the amount of troops guarding the barricade by assisting the adventurers.

"They're paid more than us to do the same job! They should fight harder! Until they die!"

Several men nodded as Bona shouted.

"Our lives are at risk too! Those guys shouldn't be running off and leaving it all to us!"

Bona called out to the nearby guards. Those further away stared coldly at him, while the ones closer to him yelled out their displeasure with the adventurers as well.

"They're here!"

At the sound of the lookouts' voices, Bona looked like he'd been choked.

Everyone's eyes filled with the shapes of the demons loping towards them from the shadowed street.

At their head was a demon that looked like a cross between a man and a frog. Its skin was a jaundiced yellow, gleaming with a sticky, shiny coating. It was covered in huge lumps all over, which looked like human faces pressed out against the skin from the inside.

A mouth that could swallow a man in one gulp gaped open, and an abnormally long tongue began tasting the air.

Around it, the hellhounds followed, as though waiting for their prey.

After that were demons which looked like a human being that had been skinned and its exposed musculature painted with some kind of black, tarry liquid.

There were fifty of the hounds, one swollen-bodied demon covered in faces, and six of the flayed demons.

"There's too many!" Bona cried like the tolling of a bell. "We can't hold them! Run!"

"Dammit!" came the angry retort. "Shut the hell up!"

Ignoring Bona's wails of despair, the guards looked to their comrades, tension knotting up their faces.

"Listen up! All you need to do is stick them with the pointy end! Our job isn't to kill them! It's to buy time! It's not hard! We're all going to make it!"

We're going to make it. Some people repeated it, and then it was taken up by others.

"Hell yeah! Let's go!"

Even the guards with terrified faces grabbed their spears and got into their ranks.

"You come join us too!"

Someone grabbed Bona and dragged him to his place. There was no time for playing around.

The demonic beasts howled, and began tearing down the barricade at incredible speeds. The guards' spears stabbed out at them from between the ever-widening gaps in the barricade.

The pained wails of the hellhounds rose up from all around them. Those demonic beasts that had not been stabbed hastily fled the barricade. They howled mournfully as they paced around the barricade, as though assessing the situation.

Some of the more collected guards thrust their spears through the gaps at the nearer hellhounds, which drove them away.

Slowly, the faces of the guards began to cheer up.

The grins of the demons in the back were disgusting, and the guards were still uneasy because they didn't know what the demons would do. However, letting time pass like this was still good. After all, their job was not to defeat the demons.

"Wh-what the?!" a lone guard cried out as he watched what was happening in front of him.

The enemy had formed into a neat line, beyond the reach of the thrusting spears.

This was completely different from the wild assault just now. The guards began growing uneasy. If they knew what the hellhounds were up to, maybe they could have changed their formation or done something about it. As it was, all they could do was thrust their spears between the gaps.

But just when they thought that was all they would have to do, the demonic beasts opened their maws, so widely that it looked as though they were dislocated. The red within their throats was not flesh, but fire.

Jets of crimson flame shot out in unison at the barricade, engulfing the entire thing in flames. The guards' eyes could see nothing but the fire.

Although the fire was intense, it still could not burn down the barricades within a few seconds. This didn't make much difference to the guards on the other side, though.

Screams broke out all around. Some had their eyes burned up, others had their lungs and gullets scorched because they inhaled the flames. In the end, all of them fell like flies. The only guards to survive were the ones at the sides, because the ones in the center were no longer breathing after being consumed by the flame.

"W-we're doomed!"

The words nobody wanted to say escaped from Bona's mouth. His movements thereafter were remarkably fast, as he threw down his spear and discarded his helmet, all to let him flee faster.

The remaining guards were stunned. They had considered retreating, of course, but none of them had embraced the idea as completely as him.

Bona ran away with a speed that was hard for human beings to describe. The surviving guards looked on slack-jawed as Bona's back faded into the distance.

However, his flight was abruptly halted by a demon falling out of the sky.

The swollen-bodied demon flew without wings, and landed squarely on Bona's back, making a croaking noise as it did. Bona cried out in pain. Though it could have killed him easily, the demon did not do so. However, in light of what it did afterward, it was definitely not out of mercy.

The demon opened its mouth and swallowed Bona whole. Its distended belly hardly changed even as it ingested him— no, there was a new swelling, with a human face on it.

Though it was hard to tell, it looked like it belonged to Bona.

Even though the sound of the barricade being torn down reached their ears, the guards did not move. So much for being an obstacle; against demons, it was little more than a pile of matchsticks.

The demons who broke through the barricade encircled the guards. A strangled cry came up from them, for they knew they would certainly die here.

It was answered by the laughter of the demons, mocking the guards' foolishness.

One of the guards looked to the sky, praying for his god to save him.

What answered him was something else entirely.

He saw a group of strange-looking people flying through the air. Two of them were supporting a third, who was wearing jet-black plate armor. He was wrapped in a crimson cape and carrying a gigantic sword in each hand.

"Throw me."

Though they seemed far away, the voice carried clearly over the distance.

The two flying supporters released their grip. The dark warrior picked up speed, as though he had been pushed forward by some force from behind, tracing a trajectory downward that ended in the middle of the road. He skidded across the ground as though there were no friction, only managing to brake after chopping off the head of a hellhound in passing.

Both sides paused to watch this outrageously dramatic entry. The silence was deafening.

"I am the adventurer Momon. Fall back. I'll take over."

At first, the soldiers were unable to comprehend what the warrior of darkness had just said to them. Then, the howls of several hellhounds brought them back to reality. He was the savior that they needed.

"Hellhounds... that's all of them? Even twice the number wouldn't be enough!"

The hellhounds sprang at the dark warrior Momon from all sides. In seconds they had enveloped him, forming a cordon from which there was no escape.

Even if one tried to parry them with a sword, he would be torn apart by the surrounding hellhounds. Even if one tried to kill the attackers directly, he would still be mauled to death by the rest of the beasts. Being hit by a leaping hound's charge would break one's balance and leave him unable to defend against the attacks that would follow.

This was a brutal strategy that leveraged on superior numbers to win.

The anguish on the face of the guards was only natural, but none of them knew what true power was.

The gigantic swords slashed and killed, displacing air in their wake.

Everyone present was speechless.

That was a single attack. A normal person would only have been able to bring one hound down at most. However, just as the sword-wielder was no mere human, that stroke was not something a mere human could do. That single blow cleaved through four of the seemingly invincible hellhounds that the guards had no hope of defeating. Momon turned with the momentum of his swing, though he had slightly lost his balance because he had used all his strength. There were still other hellhounds left, and now it seemed impossible for him to avoid their attacks.

Even though he wore a suit of sturdy plate armor, the hellhounds had sharp teeth, and claws that could rend steel. And there would be no way to survive unscathed after being attacked by that many hellhounds.

In the guards' eyes, they imagined their would-be savior taking countless wounds before them.

However, that was far too presumptuous.

Momon did not try to force himself back into balance, but turned with the momentum. The crimson cape fluttered, like a cyclone of fire. With graceful steps that almost looked like dancing, Momon stepped lightly upon the ground, while his swords spun in a horizontal sweep from left to right, roaring as they went.

The remaining hellhounds were cut apart, their bodies flung far into the distance by the power of his swings. Any hellhounds who could still move were long gone.

"Just... just two hits?"

The murmuring from one guard represented the words in their hearts. Or rather, after seeing the majesty of this display, they had nothing else to say.

"Next up... Devourers and Gazer Devils, huh. How boring."

After muttering to himself, Momon strode over to the demons. There was no caution or wariness in his footsteps, as though he were walking through a park. Normally, the guards would have called out to him to stop, but after seeing his prowess, nobody could even think of doing that.

The only thing mere mortals could do was watch the back of a great warrior as he went to work.

Unable to bear the encroaching pressure that came from the man approaching him so casually, the red-eyed demon roared and leapt at him.

One flash.

The dismembered parts of the corpse flew in all directions.

Momon had not broken his stride for even a single second. He continued walking, as though the red-eyed demon had never existed, with an ease like he was alone in the wilderness.

"...Incredible..."

As though reacting to the guards' words, the Devourer opened its maw. It was like the jaws of those snakes which could open up and swallow their prey whole. In its depths, one could see the flickers of fires within. The tormented expressions intensified on the faces pressed out from the inside of its body, and theirs were the screams of souls condemned to a fate worse than death.

The Devourer could consume the souls of its victims to produce a wail that would terrify and kill any living creature.

However, before that, Bona and the Devourer's head were both chopped off.

The thrown sword fell on their heads and lodged deeply into the earth.

"There's no problem if you kill it before it can wail."

With that, Momon walked over and wrenched his sword out of the corpse.

In just over ten seconds, he had exterminated the demons the guards thought were impossible to beat.

The guards cried out. It was the joyous sound of men who had been granted a miraculous reprieve from death.

Though bathed in praise, Momon took no notice of it and instead spoke calmly to the guards.

"...After this, I will be moving to lead the adventurers' counterattack. You fellows need to hold the line for just a little longer. Well, I guess since I've already taken these guys out, the next wave won’t be coming so soon. Nabe, Evileye, you can come get me now."

The two magic casters descended from the sky to pick Momon up. As he rose into the air, Momon turned to say one last thing to the guards.

"I'm going to take out the enemy leader. Until then, please protect the civilians behind you. I'm counting on you guys."

As they watched Momon fly from the area, the guards sighed.

If a hero like that put his trust in them, then there would be no complaints at all about defending this area with their lives.

"Oi! Get the roadblocks up! We need to get ready to stop the enemy's advance! Worry about what happens when it gets torn down later!"

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:44

Lakyus stood at the head of the assault team that was formed of mithril and orichalcum ranked adventurers. Tina was by her side too, and together they advanced.

Before she set out, Lakyus had heavily considered her position. Anyone who could use resurrection magic should not be on the frontlines. However, Lakyus' absence would lead to a huge drop in fighting power. Since the priority was to get Momon safely to Jaldabaoth, it stood to reason that Lakyus should not stay in the back.

They avoided the route Momon had taken, instead choosing to take one that led them to a location which had a barricade manned by guards. All they saw on the way there were streets painted in blood, with chunks of shredded meat scattered everywhere. Of course, the barricade had been destroyed so thoroughly that there was no sign it had ever existed to begin with.

In order not to make too much noise, the adventurers formed up into a group and crept ahead. However, after only about thirty meters of movement, they turned a corner and were beset by demons.

At the start of the battle, the adventurers, with their high fighting ability, enjoyed an overwhelming advantage in combat, but gradually, the balance of power began to shift. This was because their opponents had a numerical advantage that overwhelmed the adventurers' prowess in single combat. Their numbers were so great that it seemed as though every demon in the area had converged on them.

"Hold fast! Keep fighting!"

Lakyus called out while activating her group support magic. Of course, none of the adventurers would retreat. They knew how important this battle was.

In contrast with Evileye's task, which was to eliminate the trash that tried to get in Momon's way, their task was to put pressure on the demons and keep them from spreading out.

In that sense, fighting so many demons head-on was, in a way, Momon's greatest support. The longer they fought here, the higher Momon's chances of victory would be.

Warcries and the clashing of steel blended together, and the sound of spells being cast and special abilities being used — like flame breath burning up human bodies — blended together in a chaotic mix.

After Lakyus confirmed the situation, her face contorted. The words of a certain adventurer stuck in her mind.

"The demons have become stronger."

Could it be that they had opened the door to the demon world, and summoned even more powerful demons? Was the wall of fire the boundary between this world and the next? What would happen if they let things progress over time? Even if they defeated Jaldabaoth, could they restore the capital to peace? Would this all be for nothing?

"There’s no point thinking about this!"

As she shouted it out, Lakyus' countless worries dispersed.

If she did nothing, she would never understand. For that reason, Lakyus drew her sword.

"Shoot!"

One of the Floating Swords hovering at her shoulders rose up and shot out at her command. With a speed that split the air, it pierced a leaping hellhound right through the mouth, destroying it without leaving so much as a corpse behind.

Looking around, Lakyus realised they had been surrounded. The advance which had just begun had halted, and since they were encircled by multiple layers of the enemy, there was no chance of relief. There was nothing to do but fight.

The vanguard cast aside their broken weapons and drew their spares. The magic casters who had run out of mana used their scrolls or wands to cast their spells instead. They were running on fumes.

The outer ring of adventurers were orichalcum ranked, while the mithril ranked defended the wounded in the middle and the magic casters who had run out of mana.

This is bad... if this keeps up, we'll be worn down and defeated. Are we once again unable to defeat Jaldabaoth?

A cry rang out, and as Lakyus turned her head, she saw a warrior who had been knocked down by a demon.

"Slash!"

Before Lakyus could move, Tina was charging at the demon, filling the gap that had been formed.

The fallen warrior was carried off by other adventurers. It was good that he was still alive, but the situation was still very bad. The fact that nobody was casting healing spells was a clear sign that the mana of the priests who used divine magic was completely depleted.

We have to fall back.

If their lines were broken, they would be routed in an instant. Lakyus could not let them die like this. She considered what might happen if Momon were to be defeated, and realised that she would have to be very careful about it.

Retreating while completely worn out would be extremely difficult. It would be better to fall back while they still had the strength to do so.

"Fall—"

Just as Lakyus was about to give the command to retreat, she gasped as a new demon descended from the sky.

It was roughly three meters tall, and its muscular body was covered in scales that looked like crawling insects. It had a tail that resembled a snake.

Its head was a flaming skull, and its eyes were beacons of blazing white fire in empty black sockets.

In its mighty arms, it held a gigantic maul.

It spread the bat-like wings on its back. With a flap of its wings, it sent a wave of freezing air cascading forth, and a wave of soul-shattering terror accompanied it. Although they had fear-resistance magic cast and thus did not panic, this was a clear demonstration of the power of this demon, which was stronger than any they had encountered so far.

Sweat flowed like a river.

"—This is bad."

With ample mana and the adventuring parties at full strength, they would probably have been able to beat it. If they could just learn more about their opponent and fight it later, they would definitely have triumphed, but right now, none of these conditions were present. Evileye, who was very knowledgeable and could use powerful magic, was not here. Gagaran, who could defend against her opponents' blows and immediately press the advantage to counterattack, was not here. Tia, who could deftly evade her enemies' attacks and attack them with her ninjutsu, was not here either. The only ones here were two tired people.

She looked over to Tina, who nodded to show that she was ready to die here. Lakyus closed both her hands around the hilt of Kilineyram and began walking toward the demon. At this moment, a nearby orichalcum-ranked adventurer grabbed her shoulder and shouted.

"We'll hold him back! You should escape!"

Seeing the look of surprise on Lakyus' face, he continued speaking.

"If you're alive, you can use resurrection magic. Because of that, we can't let you fight it, if only because the rest of us are counting on you to revive us!"

A smile filled with masculine charm appeared on the adventurer’s face. It was a smile that suited an orichalcum-ranked adventurer like him. The adventurers around him nodded in unison.

When one thought calmly about it, they were right. Rather than prepare herself to die, she should prepare herself to live, so she could extend a lifeline to the ones who would fall in battle.

"The material components for a resurrection spell are very expensive. You'd best sell your lives dearly!"

"Hey, didn't you say you wanted to be the pride of the princess or something?"

"Let the damn nobles pay for it! They've certainly got the coin!"

And just like that, as though they were going for a picnic, several adventurers peeled off from the huddled group. There was no discussion, not even a glance in each others' eyes— they simply walked out in perfect synchronization to stand before the demon.

Seeing the carefree way in which they went to their deaths, Lakyus bit her lip and turned away.

"Break out with all your strength! As long as you can walk away in the end it'll be fine!"

With that, Lakyus charged the demonic hordes, raising Kilineyram in her hands. She trusted her defense entirely to her armor and her magic. Abandoning the nearly-broken defensive line, she prepared to carve a crimson road through the demons.

It felt like she was being ripped to shreds, her flesh pierced by daggers, forcing Lakyus to grit her teeth against the pain that assailed her. From a detached point of view, she knew that her body was nearing its limits, so she cast a silent healing spell. Although Lakyus absolutely had to survive this encounter, she could not do it without exerting herself to her utmost.

"Haaaaaaa!"

Lakyus channelled most of her remaining mana into Kilineyram. The stars in its body began to shine with an unearthly radiance, and the body of the blade swelled up as well.

“Super skill! 「Dark Blade Mega Impact」!”

With a horizontal sweep, black power flowed out in a vast, slashing wave. The lower ranking demons were reduced to sightless atoms by the explosive burst of non-elemental energy.

Strictly speaking, calling the attack was not necessary, but if it worked, it worked. However—

"Still... not... enough?!"

Lakyus' tired eyes could only see a veritable wall of low-tier demons. Although she had just blown away so many of them in one stroke, the breach she made had been immediately filled back up.

Could she break through? Lakyus' unease began growing again. Kilineyram had returned to its original dimensions.

At this moment, Lakyus saw behind the demons— a flash of metal, the roar of a man's voice.

“—「Sixfold Slash of Light」!”

The six simultaneous cuts cleaved the demon hordes apart.

"「Sixfold Slash of Light」! 「Pace of the Wind」! Hooooh!"

Once more, seven demons were slashed through like a hot knife through butter. That sharpness made her think of Razor's Edge, the sword that could cut through anything, and it scared the demons senseless.

"Kill them all!"

In time with his wrathful cry, a hedge of spears bristled out from behind Gazef.

There was no mistaking the glint of that metal. Countless spears stabbed out from behind Gazef. Those were the palace guard knights and troops. A force of hundreds of soldiers that looked like they were going to flood the alley.

Seeing that they were outnumbered more than two to one, the demon horde’s encirclement began to waver.

Shouts of joy rang out, and the ragged adventurers began to retreat, covered by the soldiers.

"Why— what is Stronoff-sama doing here?"

Wasn’t he supposed to stay behind to protect the palace and the royal family? As though in response to Lakyus' words, his face turned in another direction.

Lakyus' line of sight followed his, and her eyes widened. There were four priests and four arcane magic casters protecting an old man. Upon his head was the crown which only one person in the kingdom was permitted to bear. His body was clothed in sturdy armor.

King Ranpossa III.

This was a supremely dangerous move.

Although his body was protected by plate armor, some demons' attacks could easily pierce steel. Also, even if he were protected, area-effect spells that overwhelmed his protectors could still harm the king. And the king was still an ordinary person, so he would probably die if struck by some magic. Even if resurrection spells could be used on him, the king would surely be unable to bear the life force drain it would cause.

"His Majesty so declared— ‘are you to protect this lifeless city, or me?’ There can only be one answer to that. To guard the King's body is my duty. That being the case, this is a battlefield where we must fight! Charge!"

The soldiers let out an earthshaking cry, and thundered forward.

Force clashed against force, but just when everyone thought the tide had turned, the body of an orichalcum ranked adventurer flew through the air, hitting a nearby wall and leaving a bright red splatter mark.

"OOOOOOHHHHHHH!"

As though saying, "come get some", the giant demon’s body halted the soldiers in their tracks.

There were monsters which could not be beaten by mere numbers alone.

"Stronoff-sama! Give me a hand!"

"Of course."

The voice that followed Gazef's answer made Lakyus' eyes go wide.

"Hang on. Don't you need an awesome fighter backing you up?"

"And an excellent ninja-to-be as well."

There was no mistaking these voices. Still, Lakyus called out in surprise, still barely able to believe her ears.

"Gagaran! Tia!"

The two of them slowly stepped out in front of her. They were fully armed and ready for battle.

"Hey. I've gotten stiff from all this sleeping around, so I asked Stronoff-san to bring me along."

"Ready to fight."

It shouldn't be like this. She already told them they were forbidden to fight right after being resurrected. Normally, one would need to get complete bed rest and even then they would still feel drained. Even so, they knew how important this battle was, which was why they had joined the fight.

Getting everyone back together was the biggest boost she could receive.

Lakyus prayed with all her heart.

She prayed that Momon would defeat Jaldabaoth, and get rid of the demons in the capital.

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:46

"I see him."

Looking ahead, one could see the masked demon standing in the center of the plaza, making no attempt to hide himself. Although she could not see the forms of other demons, Evileye was not foolish enough to think that they were not there.

Having noticed them approaching, Jaldabaoth turned and bowed elegantly. There could only be one meaning behind this.

"A trap... what now, Momon-sama?"

"It doesn't matter what awaits us. We just have to smash it all."

"Just so."

Momon's tone no longer had its original seriousness and formality, which was probably because their travel together had made them more familiar with each other. With this in mind, Evileye began switching to a more casual way of speaking as well. If she kept concealing her true self, when they started going out seriously, they would probably break up right away. So even though revealing her true self might have been too early, taking a more casual tone would probably be a good idea, Evileye thought.

"It seems it's starting right on schedule."

From behind, the sound of drums and battlecries rang out. In order to ensure Momon could fight Jaldabaoth one-on-one, the troops would begin their attack. This was the only chance they would have. As such, there was no other way to save the capital other than by defeating Jaldabaoth.

"Ahh, that seems to be the case. It would appear that it’s time for the final battle. Momon-sama... leave the other enemies to myself and Nabe. Momon-sama should focus all his attention on fighting Jaldabaoth."

"Understood. In that case, since you've come this far with me, when I defeat Jaldabaoth and return in triumph, can I hope that you will stand by my side? Please work with Nabe on this, for I hope the three of us can return together."

"Understood, Momon-san."

The three of them landed in front of Jaldabaoth. Evileye looked around, and from a house adjoining the plaza, a maid appeared.

She wore a mask like the last time she saw her, with a fixed expression. But Evileye could feel the hatred directed at her.

There's probably more than one of them.

Jaldabaoth already knew who was stronger between herself and the insect maid. Now that their side also had Nabe, a magic caster who might be able to rival him in power, there was no way he would join the battle alone. Was he planning to swamp them in demons, or was there another subordinate of a comparable level waiting in the wings? Both possibilities made Evileye break out in a cold sweat.

After that maid, more people in masks similar to his appeared.

They were all wearing different kinds of maid uniforms.

And they numbered...

"...Four of them?!"

There were a total of five people with fighting power comparable to herself. Two against five would be far too great a difference in power. The battle seemed unwinnable from the very start.

"Damn it! I underestimated Jaldabaoth's forces!"

If this kept up, they would be overwhelmed by sheer numbers, and then the maids would go on to interfere in Momon and Jaldabaoth's duel.

In an evenly-matched battle, even a little bit of support could make the difference between victory and defeat, just like that battle with the insect maid.

"Then I will leave the five of them to you."

Saying that, Momon grasped his swords in his hands, striding naturally toward Jaldabaoth. As his mighty back receded from her, Evileye's heart filled with sadness. If only she could lose herself in that flowing red cape of his, it would clear away all her unease and frustration.

Evileye rebuked the part of her that wanted to reach out a hand to him.

She had originally come here with the determination to die. Even if her opponents were stronger than expected, she could not do anything as shameful as beg for help. And Momon's earlier words were clearly a sign of how much he trusted her. A man like him would never be so callous or cruel.

Come to think of it, he definitely said something from behind his back. If it was Evileye and Nabe, they would definitely be able to hold the enemy back until I won, something like that.

A fire blazed up from within the depths of Evileye's heart.

"Then here I come, De... demon!"

Momon roared, and slashed at Jaldabaoth. A fierce battle started. In order to keep the other two from being drawn in, Momon pressured Jaldabaoth, slowly forcing him away.

"Then, I'll take three and you take two, how about that?"

"Are you sure? I'm alright with three people too."

"Hmph," Nabe smirked.

"You take two, I'll take three."

Evileye felt she had a better grasp on Nabe's personality, and smiled.

To be more precise, Evileye's impression of Nabe as a rival was improving, as a fellow mage who could stand by Momon's side.

Really, if it was just Momon and Nabe, I could just take off my ring and reveal my true form... Well, first I need to go back alive.

"You're so stubborn. All right, I get it. I'll take care of these two quickly, and then come to support you. Fight like you want to live— what?"

Evileye had the feeling that everyone present — all five maids and Nabe — were all looking at her. As though they had already planned out everything in advance, something seemed out of place.

"No, there's nothing."

After that cold answer, Nabe took the first step to the side.

"Then, although I said I would handle three of them, our opponents will be the one deciding who they will send at us."

The ones who were lured out were the insect maid, the twin-braided maid, and the drill-haired maid. The ones who stayed with Evileye were the maid with the bunned-up hair and the long-haired maid.

"My name is Alpha. This is Delta. We shall be your opponents."

"Are you now? This is all quite formal. My name is Evileye. I shall defeat the two of you!"

Evileye had not intended to prolong the fight with conversation. Had she thought that way, her opponents might have picked up on it and killed her instantly. She had to be patient.

"Is that so? How scary."

Evileye's first move was to activate her ace in the hole. It was a special ability that would cause the negative energy flowing through her body to overload, and infuse every attack she made with negative status effects.

"Here I come!"

With a cry, Evileye began her spell.

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:59

"Don't look down on me."

The negative energy-infused crystals sprayed out at the running maid, Alpha. This was a bludgeoning and piercing physical attack, and the negative energy would drain her life force.

At least, it should have. However, Alpha kept running, with no sign that she had been hit at all.

"Kuh!"

Evileye took to the sky. Close combat was a very bad idea for an arcane magic caster. Putting more distance between them would increase her chances of victory.

As she floated into the sky, something bounced away before her eyes. It must have been an attack deflected by her ‘Crystal Wall’, but at the same time, the sparkling light wrapping her body began dimming rapidly.

Although it could neutralize fairly powerful attacks, she would be lucky if the only things they threw at her were things the ‘Crystal Wall’ could negate by itself. The ‘Crystal Wall’ would only work against attacks below a certain level, and it was completely useless for anything more.

"Again?!"

The one using ranged weapons was the maid in the rear, Delta. She had fired on Evileye when she was flying earlier.

"Hah!"

Alpha entered a stance, and lunged at Evileye. It made her click her tongue.

Normally, Evileye wouldn't even take anyone coming at her with their bare fists seriously, but that was only the arrogance she felt toward the insignificant beings who had always been beneath her. Shortly after fighting with Alpha, she was keenly aware of that. Alpha was truly a fearsome opponent. Every time she tried to open a gap between them, her opponent would come in swinging, several times faster than herself. If she took a direct hit without the protection of her barriers, she would be destroyed.

If she was still with Gagaran and Tia, she would not have been so careless. Now, Evileye felt like she was walking on a tightrope.

The most annoying thing was their flawless coordination. Teamwork could greatly increase the fighting power of adventurers. Right now, the two of them were giving her an object lesson in jolly cooperation.

"How can demons work together so well... what the hell!"

I have no right to say that, Evileye thought. The others in her party were human, but she was one of the undead.

A *gang* sound rang out, and the protective ‘Crystal Wall’ grew ever thinner. One more hit and it would be pierced.

Evileye cursed, trying to get away from Alpha, who was intent on chasing her down and beating her up. Although Evileye's body was superior to a normal human by virtue of being a vampire, Alpha's body was even more so. The only reason why Alpha had not caught her already was entirely because of her flight spell.

Using magic required focus, during which the body could not move. As a result, having to constantly back away was very difficult. Movement would disrupt one's sense of balance and make concentration difficult. This was why magic casters stood still to cast their spells. Because of this, Evileye had chosen to use ‘Flight’ to maintain a distance without disrupting her concentration, and thus fight a mobile battle. That was nothing special by itself; any magic caster who could use ‘Flight’ had mastered that tactic. How well they did it was a matter of talent, but as a vampire, Evileye had the natural ability to fly and 250 years of experience to master it in.

Even so, it took effort to escape from Alpha. And although she could kite one opponent in circles in the large plaza, there were two opponents.

Another *gang* sound rang out, and the barrier protecting her was completely destroyed.

It was hard to believe anything could break the ‘Crystal Wall’ in three hits, but there was nothing to be done about it.

“「Sand Field— All」!”

Sand particles dispersed throughout the surroundings. Although Delta was too far away to reach, Alpha was completely caught in the area. Because it would affect one's comrades too, this spell was useless in a group fight. Any opponent within its area would be immobilized, as well as being blinded, silenced and dazed. On top of that, because of Evileye's trump card, the sand was infused with negative energy that would drain life force.

This 5th tier spell was her own creation. It was one of the strongest cards Evileye had up her sleeve.

However, Alpha did not slow down, nor did she look like she was hurt at all.

"But how?!"

Was she immune to immobilization and negative energy?

"You deserve praise for that! What a splendid set of resistances!"

Alpha's answer was to vanish. As though she had performed a short-range teleport, she materialized in front of Evileye and kicked her in the face.

Her mask cracked with a *mekii* sound as Evileye was flung far away.

She bounced off the floor with a *dang, dang* before she managed to recover, groggily shaking her head.

"「Crystal Wall」!"

Alpha's fist collided with the suddenly-materialized crystal wall, producing a thunderous crash. Cracks spread where Alpha had struck it, as though it had been hit by a wrecking ball.

"...Hmph!"

Another "dang" rang out, and as Alpha's foot struck the ground, she transmitted her inner force into the cracks in Evileye's wall, and it crumbled before her eyes.

"Is this ‘Charged Energy Release’?!"

At this moment, while trying to clear some distance, Evileye felt a great tremor run through the earth. She did not know where it came from, but her instinct told her that it was the aftershocks of the battle of those two.

"Are they still fighting... no, most likely their fight has reached its climax. That means... I have to buy more time!"

As she said that, Evileye charged at the attacking Alpha.

She just needed a little bit longer. She had to drag this fight out. With that in mind, Evileye fully prepared herself for death, and carried out her kamikaze attack.

Alpha's hands were moving in circles in preparation to receive Evileye. She stood tall, like an invulnerable fortress, but even seeing this, Evileye did not stop—

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:53

While Ainz and Jaldabaoth struggled with each other, they crashed into a house. The door shattered as Ainz drove Jaldabaoth into it, scattering splinters everywhere. The interior was dark and cramped, unsuited for Ainz to swing his sword.

Ignoring Jaldabaoth, Ainz rose to his feet and walked off. Jaldabaoth got up as well and followed him. They entered another room, with a small table, two chairs, and Mare.

Mare pulled up a chair for Ainz to sit. Then, with Ainz's permission, Jaldabaoth removed his mask, revealing Demiurge’s face.

"Firstly, is this room secure?" Ainz asked.

"There is no problem. The words spoken here are for our ears alone."

"Is that so... Well, then. First off, I have a favor to ask of you. Do not harm the guards I passed on the way here. While this place is fairly distant from E-Rantel, helping people in distress is good publicity."

"Understood. Will it be acceptable to transmit orders by telepathy?"

"Go ahead. In the meantime, tell me about your plan."

Even though Demiurge had already explained the plan to Narberal via ‘Message’, she had not told him anything about it yet. He was forced to remain silent and not express his displeasure in order to make sure the plan wasn’t ruined, but in his heart he was worried about it.

"Very well. This operation has four main objectives—"

"Ho... I only counted three. Four, you say?"

Demiurge smiled. It was a smile of smug satisfaction.

"I feel as though I have gotten the better of Ainz-sama for once."

Ainz magnanimously waved his hand. Of course, he did not even know what the first three were, but Demiurge's words still made him uneasy all over.

"You've always been one step ahead. I've got a long way to go."

"What are you saying, my liege? Truly, you are too humble."

"No, really— forget it. Then, tell me about these objectives."

"Indeed. To begin with, the objective of attacking the warehouse district was to secure the wealth and goods within and transport them to Nazarick. To facilitate this, I had Shalltear open ‘Gates’ in front of the warehouses, and let Pandora's Actor handle the matter of transportation."

This was a very profitable objective indeed. Ainz silently praised Demiurge from the bottom of his heart.

Losing so much wealth would make life in the capital more difficult in the future, but at this point in time, Ainz had no way of knowing that. Right now, all he felt was relief that the problem of funds was solved for the moment.

"The second is to cover up our involvement in our attacks on the hideouts of the Eight Fingers in the area. As you have no doubt surmised, a direct attack on the Eight Fingers' hideout would arouse suspicion. If we are unlucky, it might even lead to the exposure of Sebas and his contacts. As such, we expanded the area of operations in order to make others think our true aims lay elsewhere."

That is to say, it was like throwing torn-off branches in the forest to hide them.

"But can you do this? What will you use to throw them off the scent?"

"Please take a look at this, my liege."

Demiurge gestured, and Mare brought in a bag, which he opened. Inside was a statue of a demon. Each of the demon' six arms were grasped a different kind of jewel. A strange, pulsing light radiated from within.

"These jewels are imbued with the spell known as 「Armageddon Evil」.

The 10th tier spell ‘Armageddon Evil’ was one that summoned a demon army. Although it could summon a massive amount of troops, they were not very powerful. And if angels were hard to control, demons were even worse, with their tendency to go berserk at the worst possible moments, making it a very difficult spell to use. The normal usage capitalized on the fact that the summoned demons were not allies by default, so they could serve as live sacrifices for certain rituals and other special abilities.

Much like how Shalltear used her Spuit Lance to kill her own summoned minions, this magic existed for a similar purpose.

"Though this item was created by Ulbert-sama, I feel it would be best used here."

From the perspective of this world, it would make sense that an item like this would draw Jaldabaoth's attention.

Ainz recalled the past.

It was about a friend called Ulbert, back when the Guild's power was at its peak.

Originally, there had been a World class item which could summon an unlimited number of demons that would eventually consume the entire world. Although that would cause a huge disturbance, Ulbert had been overjoyed when he heard about it and strove to create an item to imitate it. But when it turned out the item could not cast six spells simultaneously, he lost interest in it and gave up.

It was plain to see that Demiurge was reluctant to give up a possession like this. That was because it was a relic of his creator.

Ainz reached his hand into a pocket dimension, and withdrew a certain item.

"Demiurge, there is no need to use that. Take this as a substitute."

The device Ainz withdrew looked similar to the demon statue Demiurge had prepared. However, its hands only held three gems, and it looked cruder in general.

"This was also a device made by Ulbert-san. Because it was a prototype, he wanted to dispose of it, but I thought that it was too much of a waste and kept it. How about using this instead?"

"How— how could I expend the treasures of Ainz-sama for my own schemes?"

"Is that how you see it? Very well, then. Demiurge, this is yours. Use it as you see fit. However, don't you think Ulbert-san might be embarrassed that his failed experiment was still around?"

"This is... how can I express my gratitude to you for gifting me with such a wondrous magic item?"

Demiurge rose from his chair and knelt on the floor. Mare, seeing him, frantically knelt down beside him.

"Enough, Demiurge. Do you not have something else to do? Think of this as a token of my appreciation for your loyalty."

"We Guardians were created by the Supreme Beings. As such, until the very moment of our extinction, we shall be utterly loyal to them. Even so, Ainz-sama has not only bestowed his mercy and care upon us in abundance, he has even given into my keeping such a valuable treasure... as for this Demiurge, though he has already sworn his complete and undying loyalty to Ainz-sama, permit me to once more offer my loyal service unto you!"

"Ah... erm, well, then, I shall look forward to your loyal service. Now, now, stand up. Demiurge. You had something else to say, no?"

"Ah, indeed I did! My sincerest apologies!"

Demiurge sat back down, and Mare returned to his standby position.

"Then, as I said earlier, Jaldabaoth targeted the hideouts of the Eight Fingers, and then proceeded to take control of the Kingdom's financial district. Seizing the resources of the warehouses was also an aim. Naturally, this device created by Ulbert-sama will be found in one of the hideouts' coffers."

"That much is clear now. And what about the third objective?"

"Yes. I have already transported roughly half the humans within this firewall into Nazarick. There are many uses they can be put to, and the blame for this will fall squarely on the demon Jaldabaoth."

So that was what he was up to, Ainz thought, but he still had some questions. Was there a benefit to letting Jaldabaoth's villainy grow? Rather, instead of inventing the character of Jaldabaoth, wouldn't it have been better to let some other demon do it?

"...so you intend to build infamy, then?"

"That is correct. The intention is to place Jaldabaoth upon the throne of the Demon King."

"Now I see. So accomplishing my order was part of your plan, then?"

Ainz looked at Demiurge, who was bowing low to acknowledge that that was the case. He remembered the order he had given. Then again, he had given several of them, and this was probably to give rise to the Demon King.

"This touches on the fourth objective, which was to use the Holy Kingdom as a proving ground for this incident."

At that moment, Ainz understood. He asked a question which had been weighing on his mind.

"Come to think of it, were these demons summoned from Nazarick?"

"How could I? I would not dream of doing so without Ainz-sama's leave!"

"Hm? Given that I entrusted the task to you, and you received Albedo’s permission, I thought you would have used the forces of Nazarick..."

"No, my lord. Those were merely the summons of my Evil Lords. After a day has passed, they can be called forth again. The strength of Nazarick will remain untouched."

"Is that so... I see why there are so many demons without memories in Nazarick. No matter, I understand. Then, another question, you said you sent every human here to Nazarick. That was regardless of whether they were male, female, young or old, correct?"

Ainz was vaguely upset by the way Demiurge could so easily and casually answer in the affirmative.

Humans were irrelevant. Perhaps Ainz had once been a human, but this body he had now felt no sympathy or closeness to them. It was as though they were a whole other species that could be casually kicked out of the way with one foot. He would slaughter any number of humans for the benefit of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. Even then, killing children still upset him. This was a vestige of the man who had once been Suzuki Satoru.

Ainz took a deep breath, despite having no lungs.

"Demiurge. If a person has not given offense to myself or the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, they shall be slain swiftly and without suffering."

Demiurge bowed deeply, without saying a word.

Ainz Ooal Gown's priority was to ensure the stability and loyalty of his subordinates.

Since they had brought children back with them, releasing them safely would mean the details of Nazarick would escape with them. While it might be possible to raise them into zealots who were slavishly loyal to Nazarick, there were very few benefits to such a plan at the moment. As such, this was the greatest mercy he could give them.

"Then, are we done here?"

"There are two more matters for your consideration. Firstly, Mare has given us an excellent opportunity."

Ainz turned his vision toward Mare, the nervous, fidgety boy.

"And that would be?"

"At the moment, we are still in the training phase, so the exact degree of success is debatable. I shall elaborate further when we return to Nazarick. Secondly, from my observations of the situation thus far, I can safely conclude that the ones who brainwashed Shalltear have no connection with the Kingdom."

"I understand. Then, I look forward to receiving your help soon."

"It will be gladly given. During our battle afterwards, please feel free to defeat me. I would do anything for Ainz-sama."

"I see. Then, before I drive you off, could you damage my armor? It will be more convincing if I bear the signs of a hard fight."

"That is to say, you will remove it, and then I will damage it? It is unthinkable for one such as myself to dare raise a hand against Ainz-sama—"

"What happens if I remove it and it's so badly damaged that I can't put it back on? During the Shalltear incident, I had a smith create flaws in the armor before putting it on. If I took it off here and you beat it out of shape, I would probably be unable to wear it again."

Ainz laughed softly. The guardians before him, not understanding why, took on expressions of puzzlement.

"Th-then, Ainz-sama? I-isn't th-that armor m-made by magic?"

"That is not correct. This armor was not created from magic. I can see how you would think that way given that I, as a magic caster, am wearing it so naturally. But the truth is, I cast a warrior transformation spell and put it on. During the break before we travelled to the capital, I sent a ‘Message’ to Albedo to have her begin future preparations. It seems it was the right choice."

Sustaining the transformation spell and other magic would both lower mana and mana recovery rates to zero. Even though he could dispel the transformation if there was an emergency and use magic, he would be starting out from a depleted state. However, in this case it had been the right thing to do. Without it, the first battle with

Demiurge might have been much more troublesome.

Demiurge's already narrow eyes narrowed even further when he heard Ainz's response. "As expected of Ainz-sama, everything dances within the palm of your hand. To think I would dare to match wits with such a great person... I should have expected nothing less of yourself."

As Demiurge chuckled to himself, Ainz back ran with sweat that wasn't there.

"Then, shall we begin? Demiurge, I'll leave the battle damage to you."

"Assuredly. Mare, send the signal. It will be an earthquake, like the last time."

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:56

"Take my lightning!"

The lightning spell lashed out, striking one of the maids.

"Guwaaaa-su~"

The maid making the incredibly fake cry of pain was blown away like she was jumping by herself, until she vanished into the distance.

"Eiiiii~"

The drill-haired maid threw her knives. They travelled in a lazy arc and struck Nabe's body.

"Kyaa—"

As Nabe let out a deadpan cry of pain, she followed after the maid that had been blown away. Entoma was pursuing her silently.

They landed in the alley, forming a straight line. Ahead of Narberal was the maid with the two braids. Behind was Entoma and the drill-haired maid. This was a classic pincer attack, but there was no tension at all. Then again, how could there be? Back then, there had been the pretense of a fight, but now even that had completely evaporated, and the mood was like a group of schoolgirls chatting in a cafe.

"So anyways, this place's been warded against spying by Nigredo-san. It should be okay now~"

"Is that so? Then... it's been a while, Lupu~."

The two-braided maid — Lupusregina Beta — laughed under her mask.

"It really has been awhile su~ this is the first time we've met since Nar-chan started running around with Ainz-sama."

"I did return to Nazarick from time to time, but during those times, you were at the village."

"Oh well~ you know how it is, these things just happen. Come to think of it, I haven't seen you in a while, Sol-chan~"

"The same. However, your way of speaking..."

"Oya? Sol-chan and Yuri-nee-san were concerned about the same thing su~. But it's okay~ I'll be careful. En-cha’s the same way su~"

"That's good... speaking of which, why is Entoma so quiet?"

"Ah... En-chan doesn't seem to want to talk right now~"

“tHat lItTle bRaT ToOk mY VoicE!”

"I see."

Narberal nodded to her. Entoma hated her original voice, so she tried to use it as little as possible.

“i WAnT To lEt HeR fEeL wHaT iT’S LikE!”

Even though her true face was covered by a mask bug, her murderous intent and anger were still overflowing in her direction.

"You know that is impossible. Since she is travelling with Ainz-sama, it will ruin his reputation if she doesn't come back alive with him."

Entoma wasn't happy with what Narberal said, but she kept quiet. It was obvious which to pick between her master's good name and her own desires. Every battle maid knew this.

"That little lady was quite strong. What is her name?"

"I have no interest in the names of oversized mosquitoes. Although, I think her name was Evil-something."

"How mean~ Didn't you guys come together as comrades?"

Narberal frowned at her companion's words, so Solution answered for her.

"...that would probably be Blue Rose's Evileye. Sebas-sama wrote as much in one of his reports."

"Ah, that sounds right."

Narberal was sure that Solution had the correct name.

"Nar-chan, are you pretending to be retarded? Are you all right?"

"Can you all actually remember human names?"

"That is no problem for me. I might end up needing to know them during the course of my duties. I took care to commit a few important names to memory."

"No probs here su~ actually, you could say I get along pretty well with humans, yanno?"

”No pRObLEMs HErE.”

Narberal was slightly shocked when she discovered that she was alone among her fellow maids. Just as she was considering whether to pay more attention to names, the sound of an explosion rang forth. Because buildings blocked visibility out of the corner, they could not tell what had caused it.

"Ah, they must be getting serious over there."

"Well, it's Yuri-nee-san and Shizu~ they're always serious. But if the fight's not over yet, that means they haven't used their real strength yet."

”If iT wAs Up tO Me I WoUlD fIgHt hER tO tHe DeATh!”

"Evileye is quite strong. By levels alone, she might not be an opponent Yuri-nee-san or Shizu could beat."

A shadow passed over the face of the battle maids for the first time. Only Narberal was different. She was confident.

"It will be fine."

As everyone's attention turned to her, she continued, "Evileye and myself are both elementalists. We are arcane magic casters that specialize in the use of a particular element. Although this means our attack power increases greatly, it also means that outside of our area of expertise, we are quite weak."

"Earth-type, then... there should also be acid, poison or gravity, right? Why crystals?"

"It must be a further specialization within earth-type elementalism. Her crystal magic must be quite strong."

"Bludgeoning and piercing physical attack magic... I do not understand..."

If it were up to me, how would I kill Evileye? While the four of them were pondering this question, the earth shook. There was a slight difference between that and the shaking of the earth caused by a great impact.

“ThiS EArtHqUAke mUSt HaVE BEEn caUsEd By MaRE-sAMA. thEn, ShALl WE moVE On to tHE nEXt stAGe?”

"Was that a signal?"

"That is correct, Narberal. Then, is it alright if we hurt you a little? It will not look good unless we rough you up a bit."

"I'll try not to hit you too hard, so forgive me su~"

"There's nothing to be done about it. It's work, after all."

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 03:57

"Calm down! Please, calm down!"

Climb tried not to raise his voice too high as he called out to the people. However, the warehouse had been packed with a lot of agitated people, so his current volume was completely insufficient to get them to quiet down.

"My child—"

"My wife was taken—"

"Mama, Papa—"

Male, female, young and old voices all blended together, washing over Climb like a wave. He could no longer make out what they were saying any more.

Climb had found the three hundred people here at great risk to himself, and they were the only residents he had managed to find. The people locked in this small warehouse had no idea what was going on outside, and all they could do was whine about how their family members had been taken elsewhere.

It was a very natural response to the current circumstances, but it was also a very dangerous one.

Even though they had not encountered any demons on their way here, that did not mean that there were no demons present. In fact, they had already seen the silhouettes of the demons several times in the alleys they passed through on their way here. If they heard the cries coming from this warehouse, then the arrival of the demons would only be a matter of time.

"You are the only ones we've found so far—"

"Where's my wife? Go find her!"

"That—"

Perhaps if he raised his voice he might be able to shout them down. Climb, as a warrior, was far stronger than any mere city guard. If he roared at the man, he could easily seize the hearts of everyone present. But Climb did not do this.

Climb was the ambassador of the princess. He was here because Renner had seen fit to put her trust in him. If he used methods that terrorized the citizens and made them dislike him, that might easily spill over to Renner as well. With that in mind, Climb found it impossible to work himself up to using harsh methods on them.

"Hey, answer us—"

"My kid's still young—"

"Papa! Mama!"

"Shut up, all of you!"

It felt like the air in the warehouse had suddenly blown all the voices away. Brain's uncontrollable shout — the anger of a first-rate warrior — had devoured the hearts of all the weaklings present.

"The lot of you are chattering like chickens just because he kept quiet. We're in the territory of these guys, and there's no way to guarantee your safety. If you don't move quietly, the demons will come and they'll kill every last one of you. If you understand, shut your mouths."

Brain surveyed the now-silent warehouse, then looked straight at Climb. The citizens who were closing in wilted under his volcanic gaze and backed away.

"Now then, Climb. Time for you to make a decision."

Climb was largely sure what decision he had to make. However, he had no confidence that it would be a wise one.

"It's hard to say, then? Never mind, I'll do it. First things first, you lot had best get it into your heads, the next time someone speaks when I do, I'll kill him on the spot. I can't even be sure you lot are all humans."

Brain exposed a little of his katana, and the reflected light seemed almost blinding.

"I'm sure you lot are wondering what I'm on about, but take a look at the person next to you. Are you sure all the people here are humans?"

The captives looked at each other in shock.

"Listen up. We saw a lot of demons on the way here. Some with wings, some with tails. Some even looked like people without skin. There were a lot of those. The ones roaming outside might be those guys... you should have seen them on the way in, right?

Everyone Brain turned his attention to nodded, their faces pale.

"Then, who can guarantee that there aren't any demons among you? No skinless demons wearing someone else's skin?

They weren't allowed to speak, but there was still a disturbance. They looked at each other with suspicious eyes, and then began adjusting their positions. The warehouse was small, but not small enough that everyone had to squeeze. There was enough space for everyone to avoid contact with everyone else.

"Relax. If any demons make it here, we'll kill them. As long as you understand where we're coming from, it'll be alright." As the mood seemed to relax, Brain capitalized on it and continued, "But, if the demons from outside come in like an avalanche, then I can't make that guarantee. Don't you think, if a demon infiltrated in here, wouldn't he want to loudly shout that there were intruders? Do you see what I mean by killing anyone who made noise? Oh sure, some of you will think, "but I'm human, why are you killing me?" but the rest of us won't know that. So for the sake of protecting everyone here, anyone who makes a noise that draws the demons will die."

Once again, he bathed everyone in the killing intent brimming from his eyes.

"Looks like you get it. First up, we've searched a few warehouses before this one. However, not only did we not find anyone, all these warehouses were empty. Taking the area surrounded by the firewall into consideration, even if this is a warehouse district there should be more than ten thousand people here. Since there's only three hundred here, that means there ought to be at least thirty three warehouses like this, right?"

Brain took a deep breath.

"So that's the problem. Why haven't we found anyone else besides you? Maybe it's just bad luck. After all, we were avoiding the areas where the demons were on alert. But... do you think anyone could accept that? Most likely they were transported from the warehouse district to somewhere else. Don't panic! We have no idea where they've been taken. But anywhere the demons take them can't be good."

Those who understood raised their heads, and there was also the sound of sobbing.

"And you lot were slated to be taken away by the demons. That means for now, you've avoided a nasty fate. But remember, we're still in the middle of the demons' territory. If you're not careful and don't move quickly and quietly, you'll be killed while fleeing. Hey, you, you look like you have a question. I'll allow you to speak."

The man who had the katana pointed at him asked his question in a frightened, small voice.

"What if we stay here?"

"Then you'll be taken away. And it'll be by those guys whom you know very well are demons, to wherever kind of hell these demons come from."

"I—"

Brain glared at him, and the woman who had raised her voice cut it out immediately.

"I allow you to speak."

"...My child is only three years old. If I stay here, and go to the same place as him..."

"Really now. I have no interest in helping anyone who doesn't want to run. But this guy is different. Just so you know, if your son's been taken to another warehouse, there's the chance he'll be rescued by another team. If you want to ignore that and stay, then I won't stop you. A kid without his mom can live by himself, but I haven't seen anyone take care of their kid to this extent."

Brain spoke coldly to the disheartened civilians.

"Then I'll say it one more time. If you stay here, you'll be taken away by the demons. If you accept this and want to stay, I won't stop you. After all, when you leave this warehouse, there's a chance you might get killed in a demonic attack while fleeing."

Climb had to interrupt here. Since Brain had said this much, it was necessary.

"But, we will defend anyone who wants to flee."

"I don't like troublesome things, but I'm doing it because of this knight of Renner's. So I'll protect you lot. We'll move out in a few minutes. Staying or leaving is your choice. If you want to discuss your freedom softly, that's your choice as well. Do as you like."

There was no discussion. This was because they were uneasy that their neighbors might be demons but because many of them were hoping that their relatives would be rescued by another team and they would be reunited.

There shouldn't be another team. We checked so many warehouses, and only a couple weren't empty.

Brain decided not to think too much on the matter, instead gripping his sword and glaring fiercely at the captives, making sure that none of them made too much noise. Climb walked over to Brain, and spoke softly.

"Thank you, Brain-san. You did what I couldn't do for myself."

"Don't worry about it, all that crap was stuff that someone like you, who serves Renner, couldn't say. But for a mercenary like me, it shouldn't cause any problems in the future. Just think of me as a whip."

"Even so, I'm still grateful."

"It'll get troublesome if we get stuck in an endless loop. I get it, I'll accept your thanks. Hm? That fellow's back."

The thief entered Brain's field of vision. He should have been keeping watch on the outside and remaining on standby. Since he wasn't coming back in a hurry, that meant it wasn't a dangerous situation.

"What happened?"

"Ah, no, Unglaus-san. The demons don't look like they're coming over yet. But like you said, it's only a matter of time."

"That it is. Who knows, this might be their final objective. Did you take a look around outside? What was that earthquake just now?"

"I have no idea. Maybe the ground caved in and demons came crawling out of the earth?"

"Don't say that sort of thing, that’s the worst-case scenario..."

"Sorry, sorry, Climb-kun."

"Then, let's get ready to move."

Just as Brain was about to order the citizens around, there was a sound of something landing outside the warehouse.

The warehouse quietened immediately. The thief stuck close to the doors to carefully check out the outside. His hand began moving in signs. They formed the shapes that the three of them had decided meant "demon". Following that, he signalled, "a strong one".

Climb and Brain exchanged looks. Then they quietly moved to where the thief was.

They saw a demon outside. It was completely different from the ones they had encountered before. It gave off the feeling of tremendous power.

Its body was nearly three meters tall, and it had bat wings upon its back. Its head was a goat skull, and in its hands it held a large hammer.

The demon turned its gaze to the warehouse, and Climb's concealed party felt its eyesight on them. Had it used magic to sense them? It was definitely waiting for them to show themselves.

"That guy looks really strong..."

"No doubt about it."

Brain muttered, and the thief answered. Climb nodded his head in agreement.

Climb quietly watched Brain. He had angered him during that encounter with Shalltear. As such, if Brain told Climb to flee, Climb fully intended to obey.

"...Climb, fight by my side."

"Yes!"

Climb answered in a soft yet earnest voice.

"Will it be all right?"

"Ah, just look at that guy. He must have fled from a fight. He's covered in wounds. If he were unhurt, I don't think all of us together could beat him. But now, if we can charge him simultaneously, we might be able to win in one blow."

“I'm counting on you,” Brain said as he patted Climb's shoulder.

Climb nodded his head vigorously, and activated his ring's power. This ring, made by the Dragon Lords using Wild Magic, contained a spell that could temporarily increase a warrior's strength. If the strongest man in the Kingdom Gazef Stronoff used it, he could step into the realm of heroes, but Climb had not reached that state yet. Even in combination with his martial art 「Limit Breaker— Mind」, he could not even touch the bottoms of Brain's feet. However, it would still grant Climb the power of a mithril ranked warrior.

"All right, let's go."

Brain, who was leading the way, was stopped by the thief.

"Unglaus-san—"

"Shouldn't you call me Brain? You're older than me, calling me -san or whatever makes me uncomfortable."

"...then, Brain. What should I do?"

"Just stay here, Lockmeyer. That guy might think we're just a decoy."

"...I'll come to help you if you're in danger."

"Then I'll count on you. Come on, Climb-kun. Although you probably know by now... don't get cocky."

"Yes sir!"

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 5th Day, 04:03

"Kuh!"

Evileye grunted as she took a hit to the belly. Although she was largely insensitive to pain, her sense of touch from her days as a human being was not completely gone yet. If she was attacked, she would definitely feel it.

In the brief window when her concentration was broken, Evileye ate another hit from Alpha.

The explosive force of the blow knocked the air out of Evileye, and sent her flying.

Evileye's objective was to draw the battle out. As such, she could not use the strategy of converting physical damage to mana damage. Without mana, Evileye would be unable to fight. This meant she would have to expend her HP and mana evenly.

Her mud-stained body was dragged back up into the air by the ‘Flight’ spell.

At this moment, Evileye saw Nabe, who had been knocked flying by her own opponents.

She looked like she had been beaten up pretty badly too. Evileye flew over to her. The enemy did not follow— were they waiting for them to join up before killing them together?

"Oh, it's you."

Evileye had been planning to help up the fallen Nabe, but she stood back up immediately and spoke coldly.

Although her injury-covered body looked like she had been in the fight of her life, something felt wrong about her. There was no fear of death, or rather, she believed that Momon could defeat Jaldabaoth before she died.

Goes for me too, Evileye thought.

"Can you still fight?"

"Of course. No problem."

That had been a stupid question.

Speaking of which... this woman has exceeded humanity as well. Could she be a God-kin too?

She had suffered assorted injuries and her clothes were stained by blood, but none of the wounds were lethal. For all she knew, Evileye might have been more badly hurt.

Compared to Evileye who had only two opponents, being able to perform this well against three opponents... though Evileye was loath to admit it, she had to admit that Nabe was better than her.

"You look like a mess."

"Not exactly."

Evileye laughed at the reply, which was so much like Nabe.

Although the mask covered Evileye’s expression, Nabe could still feel that the air had changed, and surprise showed on her face.

"No, I was thinking that that reply was just like you."

"...Was it now. So, what will we do now?"

"What can we do? How can we draw this battle out?"

Evileye turned a sharp look at the five enemies. Apart from the insect maid whose killing intent stabbed at her like a lance, the others didn't radiate any hostility at all, though from their attitudes they seemed pretty confident of killing them both easily.

"Your enemies are there too."

"Looks like we’re out of options. If the numbers were even we might have a chance to win. But if they're on the same level as us and there's more of them, then we'll lose for sure."

"How about running? If you turned around and fled, they might not pursue."

"If you want to do that, I'll cover you from the rear."

Dissatisfaction twisted Nabe’s otherwise prim face. Although even if she made a sinister expression, it would not detract from her beauty in the slightest, Evileye thought in with a rather out-of-place sense of appreciation for a rival.

Suddenly, a person was blown through the air as a building collapsed. He bounced several times on the floor, tumbling head over heels before grinding to a halt.

Evileye did not need to breathe, but she still held her breath.

For a moment, she thought it might be Momon who was sent flying, but that was not the case. It was Jaldabaoth.

Seeing Jaldabaoth unsteady on his feet, Evileye got excited. It was obvious who had wounded him so badly and knocked him back so far.

Evileye's vision spotted the warrior standing where the body had come flying from.

The jet-black armor was heavily damaged, making it clear just how intense their duel had been. Even so, the man standing there did not waver in the slightest, showing Momon's clear superiority in comparison to Jaldabaoth, who was getting to his feet.

Evileye's body was filled with joy, and she tightly clenched her fists.

Momon slowly lowered his swords, and spoke to the rising Jaldabaoth.

"Well, that was fun. How shall I put it... it felt real. I could feel myself really battling with you. So this is what it feels like to be the vanguard... in the past, I used to overpower all my opponents in melee combat, so I didn't feel anything, but now I feel like a berserker. So, bringing out your full power shouldn't be a problem for you, no?"

Telling one's opponent to use their full strength was a grave insult. Thinking about this, Evileye shook her head. Perhaps this was Momon's true desire.

A strong man like Momon rarely had the opportunity to go all-out. Most of the time his opponents would be slaughtered before he could get serious. A man like him would be overjoyed if he got the chance to face an opponent that required his full strength.

"Then, please allow me to do so."

Jaldabaoth had probably understood it as an insult, and so he repaid it with exaggerated, sarcastic politeness.

As she watched him, Evileye was filled with the pride of knowing that she understood Momon better than Jaldabaoth.

"Then, I shall come at you seriously."

"Bring it, Jaldabaoth."

With those words as the signal, the two of them clashed in the middle of the plaza.

Their exchange was like a replay of the time Evileye had first met Momon. His high-speed, consecutive attacks were deflected by extended claws. Since they could parry his greatswords, the hardness of those claws must be beyond human understanding.

Momon leapt back in a grand, soaring arc. His jumping strength made her think that he might have been using the ‘Flight’ spell. In the moment where her view of Momon was blocked by his spinning swords, she saw him produce a spear from nothing, from the corner of her eye.

It was a crimson spear whose point was like a cyclone of fire. Momon hurled it at Jaldabaoth. So fast did it fly that all she saw was its crimson trail seared into her vision as it headed for Jaldabaoth.

"「Aspect of the Demon: Hellfire Mantle」."

As the spear struck, a roaring flame blazed up from the ground, and a massive shockwave erupted from Jaldabaoth.

“Kuh!”

In order not to be blown away by the titanic displacement of air, Evileye crouched down and tried to weather the storm. Fortunately, because she wore her mask, she was able to keep her eyes open during the tempest.

Looking ahead, she saw Momon raising his swords, which stood unwavering in the wildly-blowing wind. Then, as though he was going to cleave the air in two as well. He charged at Jaldabaoth once more.

Jaldabaoth was ready to receive the attack, his body wreathed in flames, and the spear from earlier lodged in the ground by his feet.

As Momon swung down on him, Jaldabaoth caught the sword with both hands. Smoke rose from his palms, and the metal between his fingers started to melt.

“So, you’re able to melt a weapon like this… the ability has gotten stronger.”

Since it was a blade favored by Momon, an adventurer of the highest caliber, it must have been made of an amazing material indeed.

But that was not important. What was important was that Jaldabaoth could spit flames that could melt steel, and that Momon could still talk casually to him despite being so close to the deadly flames.

“—These two are incredible.”

Evileye was terrified. She already knew how strong the two of them were, but her body was still trembling uncontrollably.

“It is as you have surmised. The fire-type damage was strengthened by a special ability.”

On closer observation, the flames wreathing Jaldabaoth had a blackish tinge to them.

“Hellfire, is it?!”

“Just so. Even a being protected with fire immunity will not escape unscathed, don’t you think?”

For the first time in their battle, Momon took a step back in retreat, but Jaldabaoth would not permit it.

This time is was Jaldabaoth’s turn to close the gap, launching a flurry of blows at Momon. That attack could have slain a human being in an instant, but Momon parried them all with his gigantic sword.

While engaged in close combat that was slowly melting his armor, Momon once again reached into nothingness and drew forth a strange weapon.

"「Frost Pain Modified— Icy Burst」!"

A wave of frigid air rushed forth from the weapon, dropping the surrounding temperature instantly. Although it seemed as though the cold could even freeze fire, Jaldabaoth’s hellfire burned hotter than normal flames. Still, for a moment, the heat was suppressed.

Jaldabaoth’s surprised exclamation reached Evileye’s ears.

“What was that? It was like the spear from just now.”

“Since I can’t use magic, I made up for it with elemental weapons. Although this was a copy of Frost Pain made as an experiment… well, I should count myself lucky it turned out stronger than the original. Granted, it’s a tool that lets me use a high-level spell three times a day, but without the special abilities to power it up, it should be nothing to you.”

The dialogue between the two of them beggared belief.

They were supposed to be engaged in an intense struggle for their lives, but the mood felt like they were merely confirming each others' strength in an easy and relaxed manner.

Evileye recalled something Gagaran had said once. When warriors put their lives on the line, sometimes they would be able to fully grasp the thoughts of their opponent, and it would create a feeling as though they were close friends who had known each other for a long time.

At that time, she had wondered what she was talking about. But now—

"Maybe she had a point after all."

Evileye was starting to become jealous of the closeness between them.

The man in the jet-black armor, which had lost its shine due to its melted surface, and the demon whose tuxedo had been shredded by countless sword blows.

The two of them who had dueled each other in a domain beyond the grasp of humanity seemed like old friends to Evileye.

"Your puissance is unparalleled."

"Indeed, so is yours, Jaldabaoth."

"In that case, might I make a proposition?"

Momon raised his chin to Jaldabaoth, as though telling him to carry on.

"If I concede this battle and the victory to yourself, perhaps we can both take a step back from the edge? Or rather, to be more precise, I will withdraw myself from this incident, and I hope you will cease your pursuit of myself."

"Are you kidding me!"

Evileye's cry was fueled by intense emotion. For someone who had filled the capital with this much chaos and death, a plea for mercy and forgiveness was nothing short of shameless.

However, a calm voice accepted Jaldabaoth's proposal.

"It's all right."

Under her mask, Evileye stared goggle-eyed at Momon. She could not understand why Momon, who was in such a superior position, was accepting Jaldabaoth's terms.

Sensing Evileye's confusion, Demiurge shrugged his shoulders. Much as she hated to admit it, he looked quite stylish while he did.

"It baffles me why Momon-san would bring an air-headed woman like yourself along. A moment's consideration should reveal why Momon-san accepted my proposition."

Turning to Evileye, Jaldabaoth continued speaking.

"In order to bring Momon-san here, and to keep others from interfering with our battle, you committed a lot of your friends and allies to the fight, did you not? Did you really think they would be enough to keep the demons from intruding into this conflict?"

Evileye felt as though she had been impaled through the spine with an icicle.

"The demon army is always waiting for a chance to assault the capital."

It was the worst-case scenario.

Although Marquis Raeven was patrolling inside the capital with his troops, she honestly could not believe he could deal with all the demons Jaldabaoth had in store. A similar conclusion awaited if the demons started taking hostages from throughout the city.

But if they defeated Jaldabaoth here—

"Even if you kill me, do you think they will vanish? I have but to give a single mental command and my infernal hordes will immediately begin rampaging through the city. Granted, their numbers might be somewhat diminished... but how many casualties do you think they will cause in the time it takes to kill them?"

"But then, how do we know that you'll actually keep your promise?"

If Jaldabaoth continued fighting with Momon, he had no guarantee of actually winning. That being the case, why not withdraw all his troops and beg off from the pursuit? If not— well, then if he died, he was going to take everyone else with him. Something like that.

However, with the capital's population as hostages, their circumstances were not even.

It was a truly manipulative and cunning offer.

I see, Evileye thought, her opinion of Momon rising even further up. He had grudgingly accepted Jaldabaoth's proposal because he had already foreseen this development. Indeed, he had no other choice.

"Then, since this outsider has accepted it as well, I will begin my withdrawal, though it is a shame I could not recover my objective. I pray we will never meet again."

"Same here, Jaldabaoth."

Jaldabaoth smiled under his mask, and then gathered the maids around before they vanished via ‘Greater Teleport’.

"They're gone..."

Evileye floated in the sky, her eyes looking to where the wall of fire had been. Nothing was left; only a slightly livelier patch of the night skyline.

The curtains were drawn on this disturbance. But what had been born of today's sacrifices?

The fact remained that Jaldabaoth existed, a demon with power surpassing the Demon Gods by far. And against him stood Momon, a top-ranked warrior. What would the world make of these two once the word spread, and how would the world change after that?

Evileye shook her head to scatter the thoughts which had blended into a big pile inside it. She would consider these things slowly, in the future.

There was something far more important than this. Evileye landed on the ground and opened her arms.

"Uwaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

With a joyous cry, Evileye broke into a run. Although her ‘Flight’ spell's duration had not yet expired, this was a situation which called for running.

Evileye ran toward Momon. Perhaps out of surprise, Momon took a ready stance with his swords. Ignoring this, Evileye leapt through the air toward him. Since she had been running at full tilt, it felt like she had hit a wall. But because of her vampiric physiology and endurance, no harm was done.

And so, Evileye tackle-hugged Momon.

"You did it! You won! You won! As expected of Momon-sama!"

"I... uh... do you mind, I'd like some space here."

Momon spoke calmly to Evileye, who was hugging him like a koala. Maybe he was embarrassed.

I win as long as I hug him.

Evileye was banking on a piece of trivia she had heard of in the past.

Some men would use members the opposite sex to bleed off tension after a battle. She was hoping that Momon would be such a man, and that he would pick her for that duty.

Evileye turned a razor-sharp glance toward Nabe.

First girl wins.

Although Evileye was grinding her soft body against Momon, his armor meant that he probably didn't feel anything, and if she bumped a wound, it would hurt.

"Ah... forgive me, Nabe, hold my swords."

Realizing that this was just wasting her strength, Evileye let go, falling from the tree that was Momon.

Well, that's true. I should keep an eye out for a good opportunity next time. Now that Jaldabaoth's seen Momon-sama's power, there's no way he'll break his part of the bargain. But even so, there's still fighting, and people left hanging... ah, pursuing my own desires will be bad in so many ways.

The battle for the capital had ended.

But her battle as a woman had just begun.

Evileye, who was thinking of her next move, turned at the sound of ringing steel.

Before her was a group of people. They were adventurers and soldiers and-

"Is that the Warrior Captain? With everyone else?"

Beside Gazef Stronoff were Lakyus and Tina. Gagaran and Tia were there too. Everyone was covered in grime, a testament to the vicious battles they had fought to get here. They looked around at the aftermath of the intense battle that had taken place here, and then, with an intake of breath, they all looked to Momon.

Sensing the meaning of that gesture, Evileye whispered to him.

"Momon-sama, lead us in a cry of victory."

But Momon did not do so. Just as Evileye was starting to get suspicious, she heard a still, small voice.

"I'm feeling a bit shy right now."

The surprisingly human reaction from the superhuman warrior made Evileye laugh out loud.

"...but, doesn't that honor belong to the one who did the most for us? Don't let this chance go by."

Momon gripped his sword tightly and thrust it toward the sky.

"UOOOOOOOOOOOOHH!"

In the next moment, everyone in the plaza raised their fists to the sky, shouting in celebration of their victory. In everyone's mouths was the name of Momon, the hero who had saved the nation.

Epilogue

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 6th Day, 08:45

The maids were formed up in neat lines in front of Sebas. There were 41 of them in total, and all of them were homunculi. At their head stood the dog-headed chief maid, Pestonya S. Wanko. Thus the domestic maid staff of Nazarick was assembled.

"Everyone, this is Nazarick's newest maid."

"My name is Tsuareninya, pleased to meet you."

The head maid greeted Tsuare, whose head was bowed low, as a representative of everyone else.

After speaking with the maids, Tsuare had not shown any signs of fear.

Apart from the stitching that ran down the middle of her face, Pestonya had kind eyes and a gentle expression. Additionally, the maids behind her were all human, without any frightening facial features.

Even so, judging by Tsuare's condition, it seemed her fear of others would never truly vanish. Although she looked like she was getting along well with others, she knew exactly what kind of situation she was in, and she was trying to distract herself from it by forcing herself to work hard.

If I don't watch her carefully, she might break.

While Sebas was pondering these questions, the meet and greet session ended, and one of the maids brought her outside. Along the way, Tsuare turned to look at Sebas. Sebas nodded to her, and she nodded by way of reply, before turning away and leaving.

"Sebas-sama, how much training will that human need-wan?"

"Train her until she qualifies to be a maid of Nazarick. However, she is a mere human, so when you train her, please don't push her beyond her limits."

"Understood-wan."

Pestonya's dog-like face tilted, revealing her canines. Although her expression made her look like a beast whose prey had escaped, her eyes were still filled with warmth.

"I think that for her, being a maid is just a first step."

"What do you mean?"

Pestonya answered Sebas, who had not quite grasped her meaning and was wondering what she was talking about.

"...wan. That is to say, I meant she would probably retire after marriage-wan."

"What?!"

As Sebas' face seized up, Pestonya's gentle laughter echoed throughout the ninth floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

♦♦♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 7th Day, 16:51

After making sure there were no guests present and that the time was right, Climb opened the doors to Renner’s chambers.

The princess sat in her usual place, her room dyed red by the rays of the setting sun. They illuminated her like a spotlight.

“Welcome, Climb.”

That gentle beauty calmed Climb’s pounding heart, and he felt as though he had been healed. Climb tugged down on his relaxed face, and went over to Renner’s side.

“Come, have a seat, Climb.”

“There is no need, Renner-sama. I have to help with the cleanup of the demon attack in a while.”

Renner’s eyes sparkled. She had originally given that order, so replying this way seemed to be the correct answer.

Climb’s next task was to take over the security detail responsible for protecting the Magician’s Association.

This was because of a certain item.

Although the whole picture of the demon invasion had not been fully revealed yet, a very disturbing magic item had been found in a warehouse. The Magician’s Association was still analyzing and investigating it, but considering the fact that it had been imbued with abnormally powerful magic and the information Jaldabaoth had let slip, it seemed likely that that was the item he had been searching for.

As a result, the Magician’s Association had gathered strong veterans. Until they decided how to properly dispose of it, they had to have teams of adventurers protecting them at all times. Naturally, Climb had been one of the people selected for the task.

It’s so annoying, we can’t punish the members of the Eight Fingers who brought this item to the capital…

Even though he stood in front of Renner, Climb could not fully suppress the irritation in his heart.

The magic item which had led to the tragedy in the capital had been found in a warehouse that was positively linked to the smuggling division of the Eight Fingers. That being the case, they should have immediately moved to destroy them. However there was a crucial reason why they could not do so, and only a few people knew about it.

They had started searching for the item because Jaldabaoth had leaked the information about it. That was Renner’s opinion. However, Jaldabaoth might have been counting on the humans to find the object his troops could not, which was why that information had gotten out in the first place.

Since everyone understood the implications of that leak, they had suppressed all information about the artifact, and as such it could no longer be used as a reason to attack the Eight Fingers.

“You should be working with the Warrior-Captain, right? I see, then everything should be fine. How about the people you helped? You should have been busy protecting the palace, but you must have stepped outside for a bit, no?”

Climb's heart lurched as Renner unleashed that bombshell on him.

"Y-yes. Everyone hopes to express their gratitude to Renner-sama."

"How wonderful. Then I must go to meet them."

"You can't!"

As soon as the shout left his mouth, Climb immediately realized that he had screwed up very badly. He lowered his head and began speaking rapidly, as though trying to cover up all his previous words.

"Everyone is still busy and I believe the presence of Renner-sama will distract everyone from their hard work and although it demeans Renner-sama's generosity I hope that you will understand my meaning."

As he raised his head, Climb wondered if his mistress' beautiful face would be creased by unhappiness, or a childish pout that did not suit her age. However, the expression Climb saw was neither of these.

She smiled.

It wasn't a simple turning up of the corners of her mouth, but an actual, full-faced smile.

Climb had seen Renner smile many times. If he cast his mind back to a time when he was happiest, it would be seeing that smile on her face after she had picked him up. However, her smile right now was somewhat different from her smile back then.

Before he could realise the answer, her expression returned to the faint smile she always wore.

"...there's nothing to be done about it, then."

Climb suppressed a sigh of relief as Renner accepted his explanation.

The truth was that he had just fed his mistress a pack of lies. Climb had not heard a single grateful word from the citizens he had met. On the contrary, they had heaped blame and scorn on him. Why did you only save us, and so on.

They had taken their anger — at the loss of their families, at the loss of their wealth — and poured out the bowl of their wrath upon Climb.

Climb had borne this resentment because those people had nobody else to blame, and out of a sense of guilt for not fulfilling Renner’s commands perfectly.

Even so, it hurt to hear those words, especially after he had battled that mighty demon in order to save them.

The demon they had encountered at the warehouse was on a completely different level from any of the others. It could have beaten Brain Unglaus with strength to spare, and it was only because of its many wounds that they had been victorious. If that demon had appeared before them in a fresh, undamaged state, they would certainly have been defeated. After hearing how powerful it was from

Lakyus, he was silently grateful that they had somehow managed to triumph over it.

And after that, the only thanks he had received were the aforementioned complaints. Although he told himself that he had become used to it, the words still cut deeply into him.

In truth, it would have been fine if Climb had struck out at those people with malicious intent. Nobody would say anything if Climb returned the insults he had received in his position as the Princess' personal knight, but if he did that, then Renner's position would be in danger. If their hatred turned toward the princess and led to them slandering her, he would be powerless to draw his sword against them.

"Now then, Climb. I have... unpleasant news. Listen carefully."

Climb closed his eyes for several seconds, then opened them again.

"The women you and Sebas-san worked together to save from the brothel... were murdered."

Unable to comprehend what Renner had just said, his mouth worked open and closed while he gasped out some sounds that might have been mistaken for speech.

"How... but how... how could that have happened..."

Come to think of it, the women should have been hidden in a waiting room and then sent on to Renner's properties.

"That was a miscalculation on my part. I wanted to hire adventurers as guards, but due to the disturbance, they had all been employed by others. So I had to use mercenaries instead..."

Renner shook her head, as though saying it had all been her fault.

"Th-that's not true! It's definitely not Renner-sama's fault! It's the ones who attacked them who're to blame!"

"No! If I had been more careful, if I had considered things more closely... that the disturbance would have weakened security in the capital, if I had let them escape when I sensed danger, it wouldn't have turned out like this! If Climb had been there, maybe it wouldn't have turned out like this. And even the adventurers who recommended the mercenaries were shocked..."

The beginnings of tears began filling the corners of Renner's eyes.

Climb's chest ached as though his heart had been crushed. Perhaps it might have been a mistake on Renner's part, but she had made the best of a bad situation. Then, who was to blame?

"Renner-sama did nothing wrong!"

Hearing Climb's forceful declaration, Renner, who had been moved deeply by Climb, rose and hugged him tightly.

To calm her down, Climb reached a hand behind her back— no. That would be dangerous.

"But, how did the information..."

"I have no idea. The capital's security was weakest during the disturbance; maybe it got out during that time? They should have been transferred immediately..."

He could not rule that out. It might have been that the attackers had followed the places and people protected by Climb until they found their way to the hiding place.

"Where were the bodies found?"

"In the poor districts of the capital, but I don't know the details myself."

"What about the corpses?"

"They've been buried. What of them?"

"I wanted to examine the wounds, see what kind of clues I could find."

"...Climb, that's enough. They've been violated enough. At least let them rest in peace."

"...Understood."

Renner's kindness touched Climb to the bottom of his heart. Certainly, her words had merit. He felt ashamed for not being considerate of her feelings, and the urge to find out the truth grew within him.

"Please don't take it too hard. This is definitely not Climb's... ah, I see we've exchanged positions."

Renner smiled. Though her eyes were still red, there were no more tears in them.

"Yes, we have."

Climb's stoic expression broke, and he smiled.

"Forgive me for keeping you. Then, Climb, you'll have to work hard now."

Though he felt a pang of longing for the warmth that had left his chest, he immediately interrupted his desire.

♦♦♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 10th Day, 09:08

Today was an auspicious day for journeys, with no clouds hanging in the azure skies above.

The crimson cape blew freely in the wind, behind the man in jet-black armor. Evileye asked a question of him.

"Will you return?"

It was a strange question, but Evileye had had a strange feeling. Adventurers were said to have no roots, but some adventurers made certain cities into their base, much like Blue Rose. For Momon, his base would be E-Rantel.

"I, I mean, there's a lot of people who'd want to go with..."

Evileye couldn't believe she was making such blubbery, simpering noises. She reflected that she was hardly a lovesick schoolgirl mooning over her beloved, but just the word "love" threw her mind into turmoil.

"...Don't worry about it."

That was his answer.

It was a cold one, Evileye thought.

With no idea what else to say, the wind blew strongly between the two of them.

The man who had been waiting for this silence spoke.

Evileye felt that this was hardly the proper way for a farewell between a man and a woman, but they were not alone here. Behind Momon was Nabe, and behind Evileye were the members of Blue Rose. And then there were the magic casters who would send Momon back to E-Rantel.

"You did us a great favor."

Momon nodded in response to Raeven's thanks.

"His Majesty wished to convey his gratitude to you in person, but..."

During the disturbance in the capital, Momon had become a household name throughout the capital. After all, he was the dark hero who had challenged the archfiend Jaldabaoth to single combat, and soundly defeated him. It was only natural that the king would want to express his gratitude in person. If things went well, he might even receive a lordship. However, Momon had rejected that last offer and refused to meet.

That attitude wasn't right.

The nobles, who valued their reputations, felt that it was nothing short of arrogance for this nameless peasant to behave so before the King, whose position was above their own.

Whispers began to circulate that Momon was snubbing the King.

There were also those who were outraged that a mere adventurer could be so disrespectful.

A portion of the nobles went on to say that Momon had made a mistake by not dealing the final blow to Jaldabaoth, and letting him flee instead, but since Momon had the backing of Raeven, they kept their mouths shut.

"Momon-san was in my employ, so if you challenge him, you challenge me," Raeven had said, in menacing tones.

And Momon himself had added, "I simply accepted a request as an adventurer, and completed it. It is nothing worthy of a king's personal attention, and to be honest, every adventurer who took part in this battle should receive accolades as well." That had appeased the nobles, and the whispers died down.

But the flames had not been extinguished yet. Some raised their voices to criticize Momon, for the nobles felt they had been insulted.

Evileye recalled what Lakyus, a noble herself, had said to her.

Without Momon, the disturbance in the capital would not have been resolved, and it would not be difficult to imagine the scale of the damage that would have been caused. However, the only ones who had come to see Momon off were the members of Blue Rose and Marquis Raeven, because Momon was in a difficult position.

During this incident, the ones who had received high praise were the adventurers, the King, the second prince, and Marquis Raeven. Meanwhile, public opinion of the nobles was less positive.

Of course, the nobles begged to differ. The capital was under the direct jurisdiction of the king, and as land-owners themselves, while it would have made sense to send troops to assist the capital, they had no obligation to do so. In fact, considering that their own holdings might have been attacked by the demons, it was far more sensible for them to protect their own property instead.

During this incident, the noble faction, which favored their own defense, maintained that the King's announcement of his identity was a mistake and stemmed from arrogance. Meanwhile, the royal faction strongly asserted that the King should have hidden in a safe place and not gone to the frontlines. In this way, the power struggle between both parties intensified.

And the residents of the royal capital who had no stake in this struggle were unhappy. "Why did these puffed-up nobles only care about protecting themselves and not us?"

As such, their respect for the ones who had actually fought for them grew, and criticism continued accumulating for the already disliked nobles. It turned into a vicious cycle, and in the end, the nobles ended up blaming the adventurers for it.

"In the end, they were simply hired battle maniacs who fought until they died," and so on.

And in this incident, Momon, the most highly-regarded of the Kingdom's adamantite-ranked adventurers, became a target. As a result, it was only obvious that none of the nobles would come to send him off. Even if some of them were friendly to him, they would be in a difficult spot because of the power struggle.

The whole reason that Raeven was able to be here was because he fluttered back and forth between factions like a bat.

"This is a letter of appreciation from the King, the second prince, and the third princess. And this is a plaque exempting you from all taxes on the land of the Kingdom. And also, the shortsword bestowed by the King. Please accept them."

As a noble, Lakyus could not help but sigh, and Evileye knew exactly why.

Being awarded a shortsword by the king had the same meaning as being presented with a medal as a knight or winning battle spoils as a noble. In the intense power struggles, the gift of the shortsword would cause a lot of trouble if the nobles found out about it. Even so, all she could say was that the King's gift of the shortsword was a brilliant move.

And here I thought the King was a pitiful nobody who didn't dare rock the boat. My opinion of him has gone up quite a bit.

Momon accepted the shortsword in a nonchalant manner and handed it to Nabe, who stood behind him.

"No, giving it as praise would be sufficient, but wouldn't the nobles have something to say about this?" Evileye said quietly.

From the nobles' point of view, someone with charisma and power becoming a noble would not be a laughing matter. It would be especially troublesome if a warrior mightier than Gazef Stronoff joined the royal faction. As such, if the king decided he wanted to award Momon a lordship, the nobles would use the gift of the shortsword as an excuse to criticize him. Although the King was the one who awarded the shortsword, it was too great a gift even as praise.

The nobles would not take it lying down.

Evileye mused this out loud, but was denied by the person next to her.

"...You're too naive, Evileye."

"Naive. The royal faction is a step ahead this time."

"Why?"

"...Because that shortsword is something awarded to nobles and knights."

"So in future, when the need comes to promote Momon-san, they can use the shortsword to shut the nobles up. It would never be awarded to commoners, you do know that, right? A lordship's been set aside for him, or at least that's what they're insinuating."

"I see... To think you put so much thought into it."

"Of course."

"Don't look down on assas— don't look down on ninjas."

"Then we should be going, Marquis Raeven. Thank you for everything."

"You're welcome. I hope we will continue our cordial relationship in future."

"I feel the same way too. And to Blue Rose, my fellow adamantite ranked adventurers, I hope we will be able to remain in close contact. I'll be counting on you if anything happens."

"We should be saying that, Momon-san. After seeing Momon-san's power, we are almost ashamed to call ourselves adamantite-ranked adventurers like yourself, but we will do our best to catch up with you. Looking forward to working with you again."

Lakyus and Momon nodded to each other.

And then, Evileye felt Momon's gaze turning to her. That was not a mistake. The proof was that Momon had seemed to be on the verge of saying something, then stopping halfway, before starting up again and cutting himself off once more.

Evileye felt her unbeating heart pound in her chest.

If Momon asked her to become his companion, Evileye would definitely accept. It would be a betrayal of her comrades with whom she went through thick and thin, but even so, Evileye wanted to be true to her own heart.

As though confused, Momon continued starting and stopping several times before he finally exhaled and turned around. The crimson cape swirled with his movement.

Seeing his back slowly recede, Gagaran teased Evileye.

"You've been dumped."

"No, that's not right. He's just that kind of man."

Momon mounted the 「Floating Board」 created by Raeven's magic caster and slowly floated up, but Evileye did not turn her eyes from him for a single moment.

"I wonder when we'll meet again?"

"It would be good if it was a simple and relaxed quest, instead of a big disturbance like this."

"That might be difficult."

"Exactly."

Blue Rose's members agreed on that.

If adamantite ranked adventurers met for a job, it would definitely be because of something big.

"Then a normal meeting should be fine, right? Evileye knows teleportation magic. Going to E-Rantel shouldn't be such a bad thing. Speaking of which, wouldn't going with Momon kill two birds with one stone? Being protected by him would also mean you wouldn't have to worry about danger when moving around."

Evileye was shocked speechless, staring at Gagaran. Although she was wearing her mask, her comical expression shone through from her attitude.

"Hey, didn't you realize it? Long-distance relationships don't end well... or are you two not going out yet?"

Gagaran looked to the sky, and Evileye's gaze turned to the heavens as well. In the distance, she saw the receding figure of Momon.

"Uwaaaaaaaaaaa!"

Evileye's wail of despair was like an angry cry, and Blue Rose laughed around her.

♦ ♦ ♦

Month of Descending Fire (9th Month), 10th Day, 18:45

This emergency meeting of the Eight Fingers had been unusual from the start. To begin with, not everyone was here. One of the missing people was Cocco Doll, but everyone knew he had already been arrested, so he was not a part of things. The problem was that the other missing person was Zero.

Everyone knew he was no traitor. That just made things worse.

From the information they had gathered, Zero's death had been confirmed. On the same day, the subordinates he had sent on the mission of "killing anyone and everyone who insulted us" had also been massacred.

The losses had been too great. Although the subordinates he dispatched had been expendable, the death of Zero, Eight Fingers' strongest man and chief of security, was not one they could simply ignore.

Every department here competed with each other, but they still belonged to the same organization. This loss would have repercussions for all of them.

Debate sprang up among them.

What should they do about the vacancy left by Zero's death? What about Cocco Doll?

Under normal circumstances they would have simply recommended one of their people to that position, but there was a reason they could not do that.

That would be because of the demonic invasion of the capital. The fallout from that incident was not a pretty sight. While their hideouts had been attacked on the very same day, one loss stood heads and shoulders above all the others. It was a particular nightmare for the

Smuggling Division's chief.

Many of their storehouses had been plundered, and after checking the remaining storehouses that had not been raided, more than half of their contraband had gone missing.

"In any case, until we manage to recover, we need to work together."

"Haven't we always been doing that so far?"

"Enough with that nonsense. This time, we really need to cooperate. I think we should shift our activities out of the capital. What say you?"

"No. On the contrary, I think now is when we should be working in the capital. Now is the time to get the new captain of the guard into our pocket. If we flee from here, that would mean we're giving up on the capital and the gains within."

"Mmm. That's certainly a possibility. However, with our security department— with our fighting strength in tatters, wouldn't it be dangerous to move around in the capital?"

The five division heads puzzled over the problem, then addressed the one head who had not said a single thing thus far.

"Hilma, what do you think?"

The woman's body shuddered.

This was a reaction she had never shown before in previous meetings.

The black circles under her eyes were impossible to hide with makeup, and she had the air of the walking dead about her.

"What's wrong? I heard your mansion was attacked too... but you managed to get away in your hidden escape tunnel, right? Did you see something that scared you?"

All the other section chiefs had their guards standing behind them, but Hilma had none.

"..."

"Well, what is it?"

As Hilma's mouth opened, so did the door to the meeting room.

"All right! That's enough for now!"

The cheery voice was followed by a dark elf boy entering the room, who was in turn followed by a nervous-looking dark elf girl.

Everyone present was stunned.

If they had been adults, perhaps they might have had a different reaction, but in front of their eyes were a pair of children who were totally out of place in a room like this. The leaders were still frantically trying to figure out if they were enemies.

"Then, all of you will now become our great Lord’s servants~"

From their silence, they probably didn't get what he was saying at all, so the boy repeated himself.

"My esteemed colleague has concluded that rather than taking control of the country's leadership, it would be more effective to simply take control of all of you. So we will forgive your various sins and allow you to become our servants... hm, slaves? Puppets? Ah well, who cares? In any case, congratulations!"

The dark elf boy began clapping, followed shortly by his nervous sister, who clasped her staff under her arm to applaud as well.

"Con-congratu—"

"—The hell you say?!"

The leaders were still trying to figure out if they were enemies or allies. It was too soon to conclude that they were enemies, but life in the underworld had taught them to stop thinking so hard, look out for their own safety, and worry about killing their enemies later.

They didn't understand the dark elves' true intentions, but since the other side had so blatantly crashed this meeting, that probably meant that they could suppress everyone here. If that was the case, even the best bodyguards each section chief could hire would probably be unable to beat them. Given that no enemy would be so stupid to barge in if there was even the slightest possibility of losing, it would seem that escaping safely would be a higher priority in this case.

Every division head would use their own guards as shields without hesitation. Everyone had the same idea, and began moving to carry it out.

However, they were far too late.

The first thing the chiefs realised as they tried to stand up was that they could not move.

"Ah? Oghhaaah? Ahhhhhhh?!"

Their bodies were completely immobile, and even their tongues were unable to move. Drool ran down the sides of their mouths.

The boy who had just breathed out began to laugh.

"Then, we'll take everyone to the happy fun place~"

"Y-yes. P-please come along."

Hilma's body started shaking violently.

"W-wait! Not me, right? I helped you, didn't I?!"

As they realised who had betrayed them, the men all turned their gazes to the only woman present.

"Please! I'm begging you! I can't take it! I can't take it any more!"

"Hmmm~ what're you talking about?"

"I, I think she means being taken to Kyouhukou's room, where her organs were being constantly devoured from the inside."

The dark elf boy's face twisted into an eww~ sort of expression.

Hilma must have remembered something. She hugged herself tightly, both hands clutching herself, her body shuddering violently. One hand covered her mouth while the tears flowed freely from her eyes. From the greenish hue of her face, she looked like she was about to vomit.

"A-and—"

"*Stop*. We healed all her wounds with magic. So it’s only natural that she’s a good girl. Although, it's a rare thing that we didn't get to kill her..."

"Mm, mm. There's a lot of corpses already, and we still need her to run the organization."

"I see. Well then, auntie, good luck~ If you betray us again, we'll lock you up longer in the Black Capsule~"

"Eeeeee!"

Hilma nodded vigorously, while still green in the face. That was plainly the look of someone whose will to resist had been utterly broken, and would obey any orders given without hesitation.

"Anyways, before we know they're going to do as they're told, you can take your time with them. OK?"

"G-got it! Leave it to me! We can definitely make something useful of them!"

From Hilma's desperate, pathetic gestures of submission, the men realized that they too would experience the torments that would mold them into something like her, and turned pale.

"Then, I've already brought a few of my boys down to help you out.

Make good use of them. There's a few more you absolutely can't kill or fight, I'll explain later.”

The dark elf boy was all smiles.

"Now then, we've done half the work of taking over this country. But... what was Demiurge saying about planting the seeds of a kingdom... ah, who cares. Next up, some other place!"

Afterword

Well then is everyone happy with Volume 6 that becomes intense in all sorts of ways?

If everyone thinks ‘as expected of Maruyama’s Overlord’, that would be great. This is the collection of things a novel’s main character would never do after all.

I hid the plot lines several volumes earlier, ‘I have been waiting for this’, I am confident of surprising everyone. Maybe some people could see through all that… but it’s hard right. The plotline hidden most deeply would be the diary. Considering the events in volume two, you won’t be able to link that far, considering the motives of the volume two killer. On the flip side, she did do something so big, so it shouldn’t be strange to hide some plotlines in her to tease the readers. On the other hand, it wasn’t much of a tease, and disappointment for those expecting something… just acting smart.

If you read this, try rereading the entire volume, you might discover something unexpected.

Next would be the characters, although the MVP for Volume five and six was Evileye, I personally prefer the rogue who was named at the very end. It’s good to be young, those who talk to themselves habitually might understand how I feel.

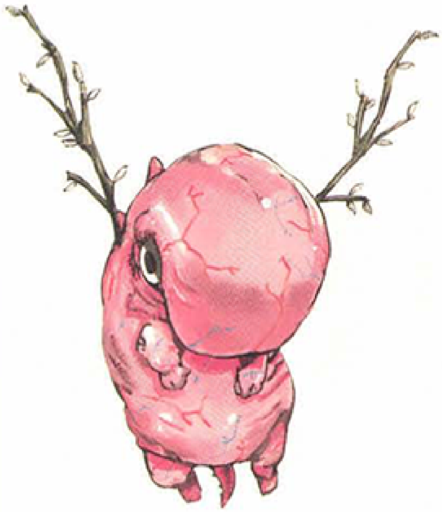
Anyway, I am grateful for the readers for reading the two volumes in both arcs. I am interested in how everyone feels about this. It would be hard to reimburse the readers their postage fees, but I will be happy if the readers send letters to me.

Next would be my expression of gratitude.
So-bin-sama for the book illustrations, Chord Design Studio which is responsible for the design work. Osako-sama who is responsible for the proofreading and editing, F-tan-sama the editor, and the various individuals who assisted in the production works. Thank you everybody. There is also Honey, thank you so much for your help.

And the readers who purchased this book, thank you very much!

2014 January Maruyama Kugane

Character 23



ヴィクティム

Heteromorphic Race

victim

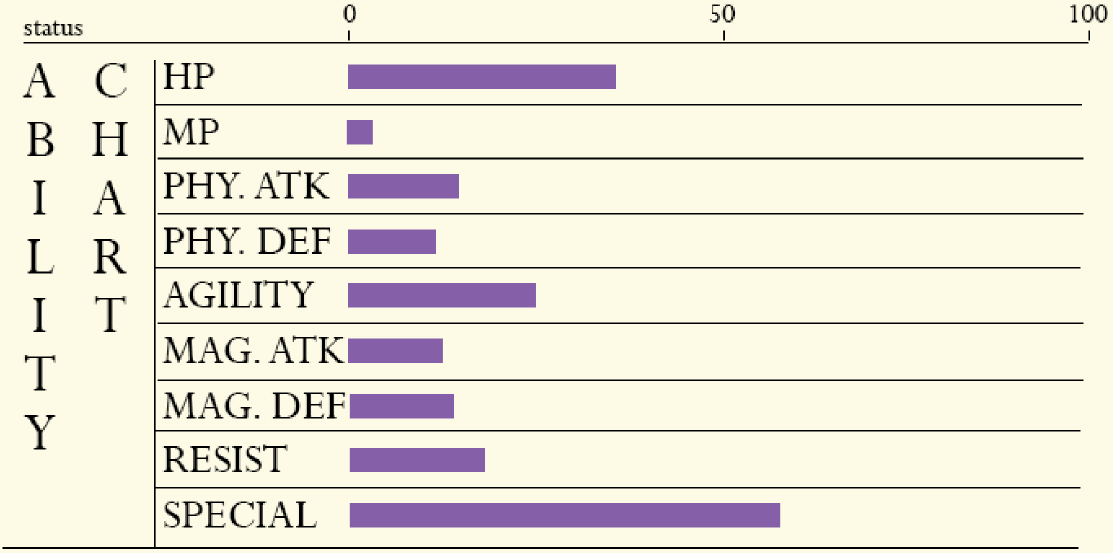
SACRIFICIAL FETUS

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 8th Floor Guardian	
Residence	8th Floor Tree of Life (Sephiroth)	
Alignment	Neutral	Sense of Justice: 1
Racial Level	Angel	10 lv
	Archangel	10 lv
	Others	
Job Level	Patriot	1 lv
	Saint	4 lv
	Martyr	1 lv

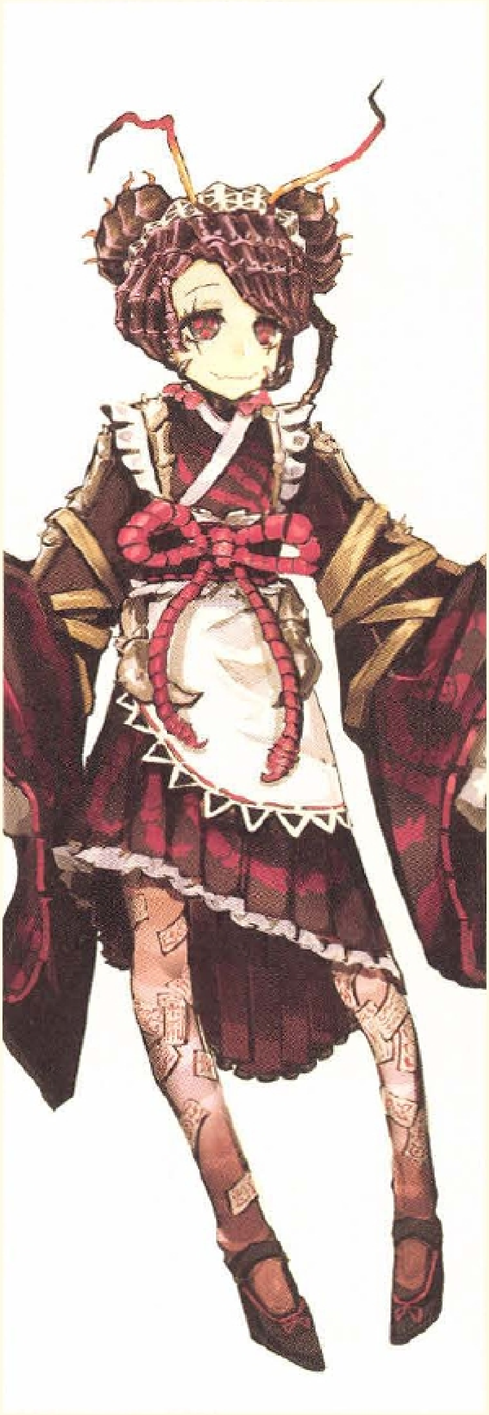
[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 35 level

Racial level Job level

Total 29 level Total 6 level



Character 24



エントマ・ヴァシリッサ・ゼータ

Heteromorphic Race

εντομα βασιλισσα ζ (Entoma Vasilissa Zeta)

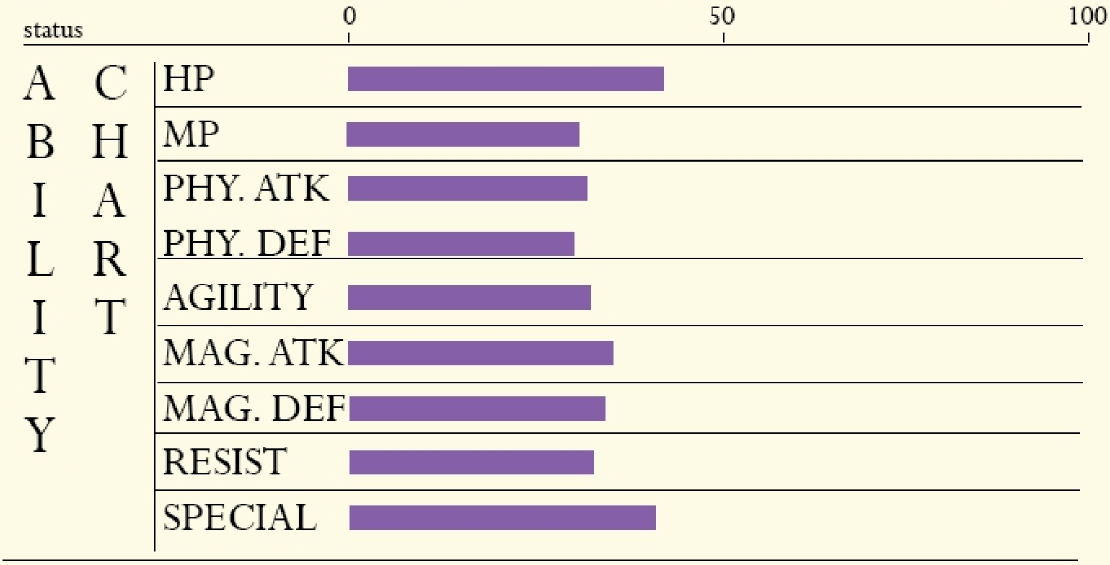
Insect Loving Maid

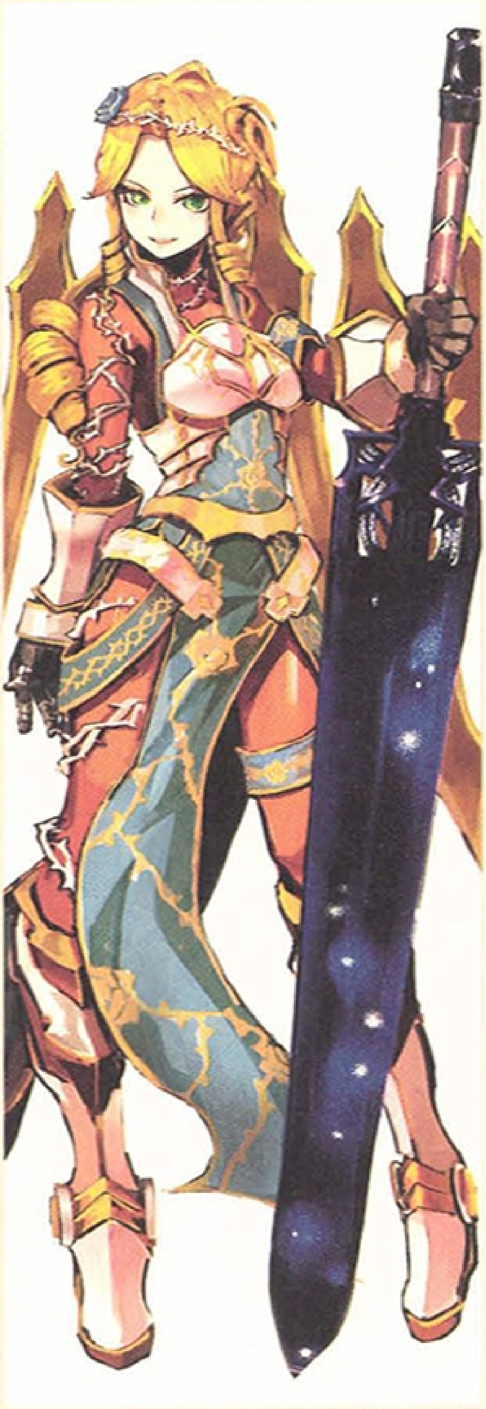
Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Battle Maid		
Residence	One of the servant rooms in floor 9		
Alignment	Neutral ~ Evil	Sense of Justice:	-100
Racial Level	Arachnoid		10 lv
	Others		
Job Level	Talismancer		10 lv
	Talisman Shooter		7 lv
	Entomomancer		7 lv
	Weapon Master		3 lv
	Others		

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 51 level

Racial level Job level

Total 12 level Total 39 level





ラキュース・アルベイン・デイル・アインドラ

Human
Race

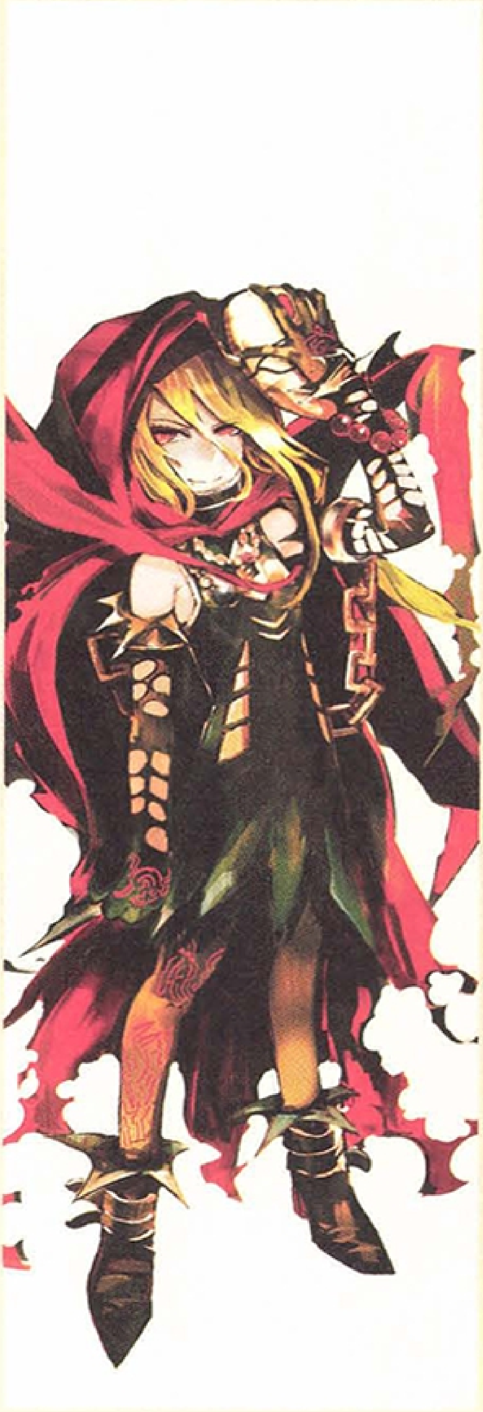
lakyus alvein dale aindra

BLUE ROSE

Job	Leader of Blue Rose	
Residence	Royal Capital	
Job Level	Cleric	? lv
	Templar	? lv
	Priest	? lv
	Others	
Birthday	Lower Earth month 1st day	
Hobby	Writing	

{ personal character }

Female warrior armed with all sorts of flashy equipment. Possessor of the demonic sword Kilineyram. Her ability as a warrior-priestess is already one step into the realm of heroes. With vast room for development, she has the potential to become a legendary figure. The daughter of an aristocratic family, she ran away from home after hearing tales about the adventure of the group 'Red Drop' (She was forgiven by her parents some time later). She is the type of person who would actively drag her comrades around, thus Blue Rose formed the team with her at the core.



イビルアイ

Heteromorphic Race

evileye

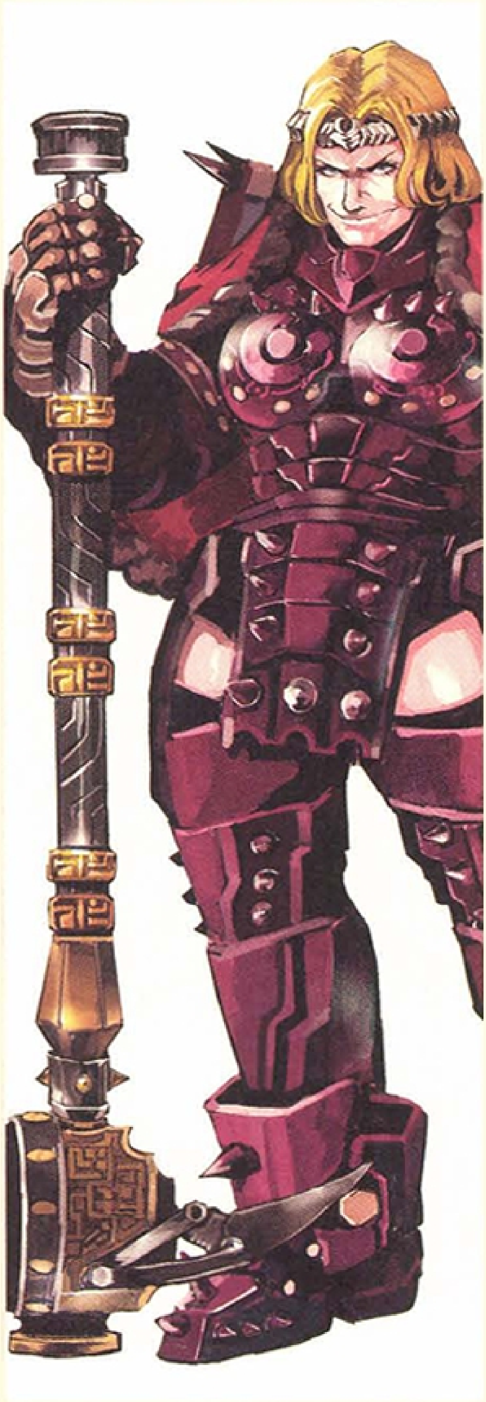
GREAT TIER MAGIC CASTER

Our Shorty (by gagaran)

Job	Member of Blue Rose	
Residence	Royal Capital	
Job Level	Vampire Princess	? lv
	Sorcerer	? lv
	Elementalist (Ground)	? lv
	Others	
Birthday	Unknown	
Hobby	Magic Research and Development	

{ personal character }

Once known as Landfall, the vampire feared by all in the past. She fought alongside the thirteen heroes against the Demon Gods. Was originally a human, and retained the appearance she had the moment she was turned into a vampire. She refus to discuss the reason she became a vampire or why she destroyed a nation. However, these two incidents seemed to be related to Evileye's innate talent. On the side note, she was the last one to join Blue Rose, but is also the most arrogant one.



ガガーラン

Human
Race

gagaran

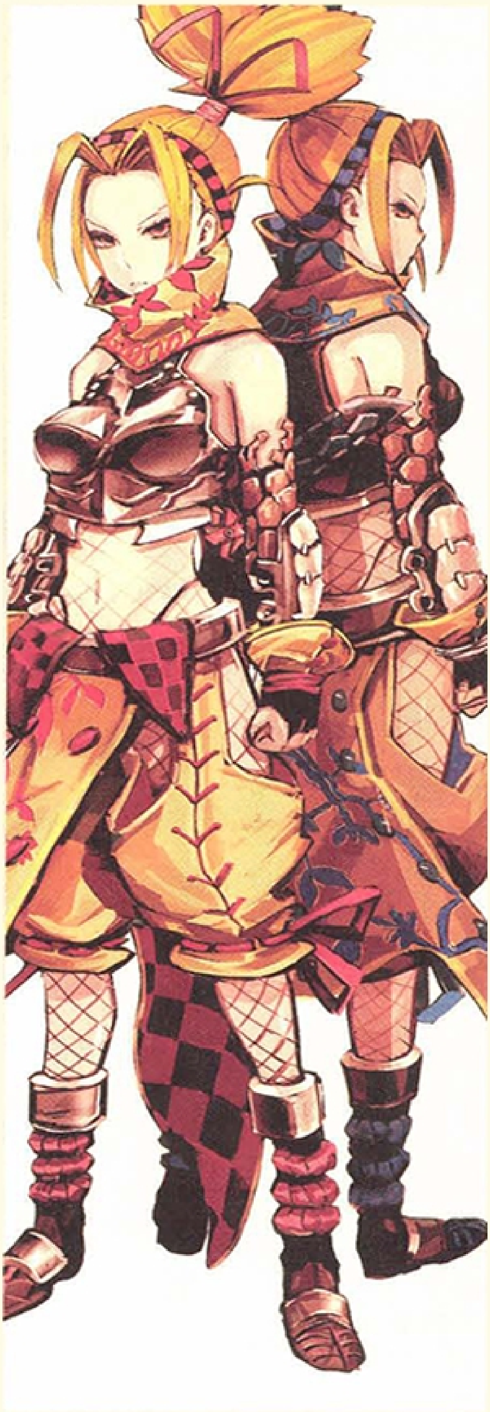
MYSTERIOUS AND LOVELY WARROR (self proclaimed) MUSCLE HEAD (by evileye)

Job	Member of Blue Rose	
Residence	Mystery (Royal Capital)	
Job Level	Knight	? lv
	Air Rider	? lv
	Mercenary	? lv
	Others	
Birthday	Mystery (Lower Earth month 2nd day)	
Hobby	Mystery (Muscle Training)	

{ personal character }

Large framed and muscular 'woman', although it is questionable whether she really is female. She saved the then would-be adventurer Lakyus, who led to her becoming one of the founding Blue Rose members (initially, there was another member with her). She is a very mysterious person, using an alias and does not mention anything of her past even to her teammates. However, she possess a strong personality and character within the team, trusted by her comrades like an older brother.

Character 28



ティア & ティナ

Human
Race

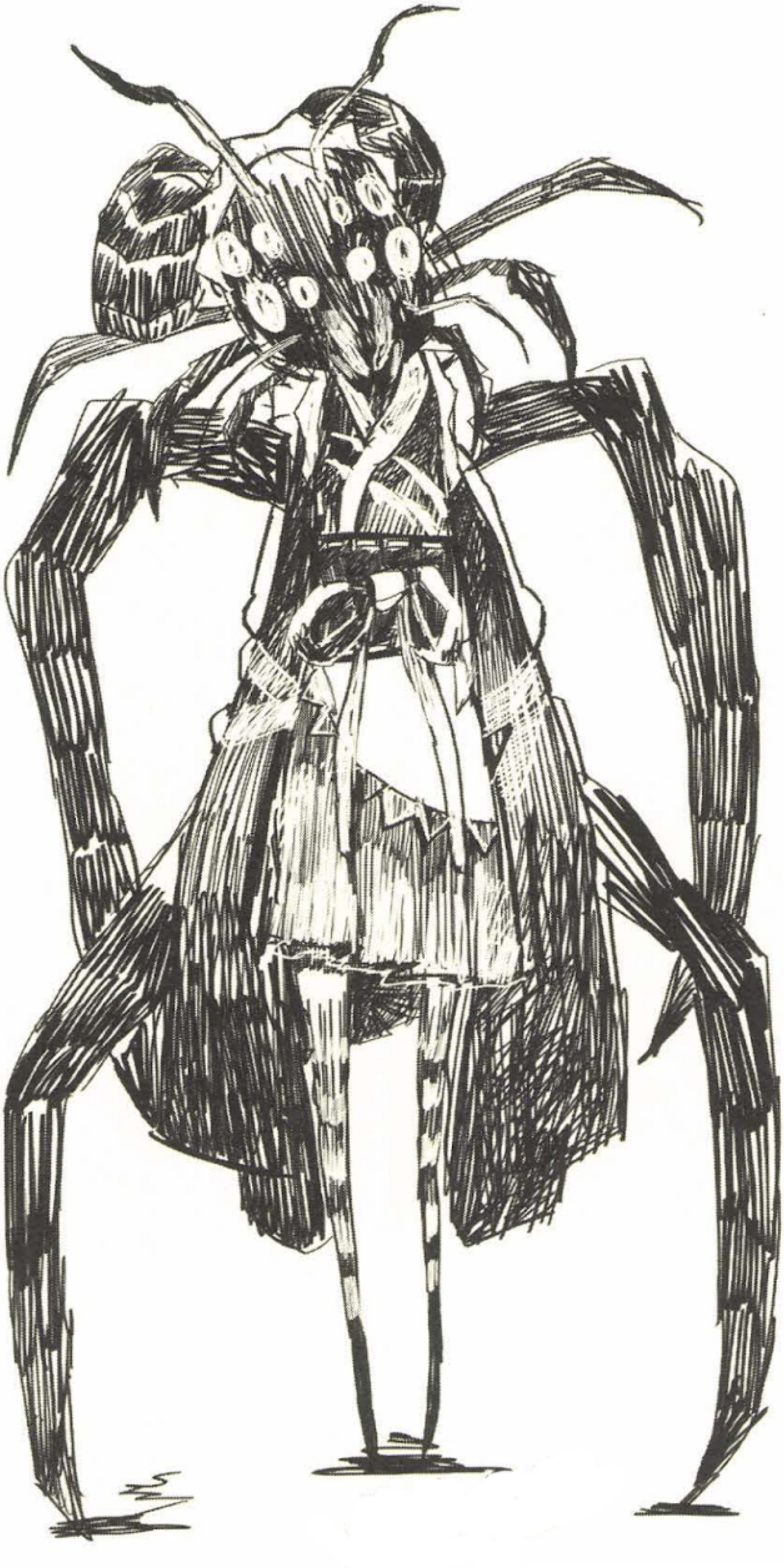
tia & tina

TWIN SILENT SHADOW ASSASSINS

Job	Members of Blue Rose	
Residence	Royal Capital	
Job Level	Rogue	? lv
	Assassin	? lv
	Ninja	? lv
	Others	
Birthday	Unknown	
Hobby	Stalking	

{ personal character }

Two of three sisters who are the head of an infamous assassin organization based in the Empire. Reputed to be able to kill anyone they target, but lost to Lakyus when they tried to assassinate her. Lakyus convinced them to join the Blue Rose at this point. Originally planned to bide for their time, find Lakyus' weakness and assassinate her. However, they decided that the adventurer's life wasn't too bad and gave up being assassins. Now, they have changed so much that they will not hesitate to put their lives on the line for their comrades.



Postscript by So-bin

FOR ENTOMA, MARUYAMA-SAN SUGGESTED KIMONO-ESQUE CLOTHING AND I WAS LIKE, GOOD IDEA! AND SO. IT BECAME LIKE THIS. I LIKE IT. HER FACE DIDN'T SHOW DURING THE NOVEL, BUT IT'S GROTESQUE!

So-bin